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Re-Placing Regionalisms:  
Atlantic Canada in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Narratives

by Will Smith

Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham  
for the degree of Masters by Research.

School of American & Canadian Studies  
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## Abstract

Though traditionally mapped as a margin, Stephen Henighan has argued that ‘By the late 1990s it seemed that only writers from Atlantic Canada – Wayne Johnston, Alistair MacLeod, David Adams Richards – still wrote Canadian novels; this may help explain the surge in these writers popularity.’ This duality of being Canadian and exploring a regional social identity, in context with an evolving global community, is navigated by contemporary Atlantic Canadian film and literature alike. Contemporary narratives challenge both stereotypes and cultural marginalisation by constructing ‘authentic’ representations of place, without recourse to overt commodification. The strategies developed in negotiating past ideas of regional identity constitute a contemporary regional imaginary. Contemporary narratives conjure a fluid idea of regional experience, open to multiple identity claims and forces of globalisation.

The narratives of this work are both literary and filmic. In literature the study covers Lynn Coady’s *Victory Meat* anthology from 2003, and longer texts from some of the volume’s contributors, Lisa Moore’s *Alligator* (2005), Christy Ann Conlin’s *Heave* (2002), Michael Winter’s *This All Happened* (2000) and *The Big Why* (2004). The study also addresses the 2006 Commonwealth Film Festival award winner *Whole New Thing* directed by Amnon Buchbinder. Each of these narratives suggests a different engagement with the tropes of regional identity. The following study identifies how the region is represented and re-placed, as the site of interpretation, the place of performance and an arena of everyday practices. Although it is often contended that Atlantic Canada is not a viable field of study, this thesis shows that Atlantic Canadian contemporary creative imaginaries react to the same pressures and perceptions.

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For Sarah, for her support and meticulous attention to detail.

## Abbreviations

- [A] Lisa Moore *Alligator*. London: Virago Press, 2006.
- [H] Christy Ann Conlin *Heave* Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2002.
- [TAH] Michael Winter *This All Happened* Toronto: Anansi, 2000.
- [TBW] Michael Winter *The Big Why* Toronto: Anansi, 2004.
- [VM] Lynn Coady (ed.) *Victory Meat* Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2003

## Critical Terrain: Placing Atlantic Canadian Narratives in a Canadian Critical Context

Atlantic Canadian narratives of the twenty-first century inherit a vast tradition of regional and national debates. Now more than ever these debates are being seen in the context of the global as regional writing garners international acclaim. Alistair MacLeod's receipt of the 2001 IMPAC Award, the most lucrative literary prize, is indicative of the recent international attention being paid to Atlantic narratives.

International and national success can be seen as key reasons for the return of critical attention to the region; however, such reappraisal is not without complications. Issues of place representation; canonicity; the relationship of the local, national and the global; and contemporary relationships to historical regionalisms are all key to an understanding of contemporary Atlantic Canadian narratives. Even the term Atlantic Canada provokes much heated debate. Of primary importance to this study is how the term Atlantic Canada can be used to represent a shared position without erasing the necessary diversity of identities present within the region. Not only does Atlantic Canada encompass four provinces, with distinct identities, but it is home to a variety of voices, Mi'kmaq, Innu, Maliseet, Acadian, and Anglo-Canadian, not to mention Scots-Canadian, Irish-Canadian and Africadian. The current study focuses on Anglo-Canadian narratives from Atlantic Canada. This in itself is a heterogeneous group, infusing texts with local idiom and place-specific articulation. The wider aim of this thesis is to interrogate how representing Atlantic Canada has provided challenges to both form and content in contemporary filmic and literary narratives. I will show how contemporary narratives from Atlantic Canada reposition themselves to strengthen place-identity and respond to the conventional perceptions of region. Conventionally the concept of 'region', both geographically and politically, is weak and culturally has

been subsumed into national rhetoric. To understand the conflicts and congruences that form regional narratives, the following is a discussion of the term Atlantic Canada and a contextualisation of Atlantic Canadian narratives in the national context, aligning regional and national critical histories.

\* \* \*

Atlantic Canada is a contested term. There are those who see the employment of such a term as a controversial act, combining the provinces of New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia with the relative newcomer to Confederation Newfoundland and Labrador. Conventionally, the term 'Maritimes' has entered into common parlance for the East Coast but this term excludes Newfoundland and Labrador. Many existing studies of the region's literature are either studies solely of the Maritimes<sup>1</sup> or of Newfoundland. Many critics have been reluctant to see Atlantic Canadian fiction as a coherent field, arguing that it subsumes the vast cultural differences of two differing areas.<sup>2</sup> In many ways my usage of the term Atlantic Canada derives from what an opponent of the term, David Creelman, suggests only to dismiss. Creelman states that each province of Atlantic Canada has shared a "common struggle against the economic hardships of underdevelopment and underemployment."<sup>3</sup> Not only can this common history not be dismissed, it has a modern day counterpart. Such common struggle is now a shared cultural context with both Newfoundland and the Maritimes under much the same subordination to centralised funding, publishing and distribution. Atlantic Canadian narratives are currently formed in a similar situation, writing against a set of literary, political and

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<sup>1</sup> This, with the exception of Danielle Fuller's recent text, *Writing the Everyday*, and the special Summer 2006 issue of the journal, *Canadian Literature*.

<sup>2</sup> Although studies of the Maritimes are equally open to subsuming the diverse differences that living near Fredericton, Charlottetown or Halifax creates.

<sup>3</sup> David Creelman *Setting in the East: Maritime Realist Fiction* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003) p.3



academic assumptions, both of their region and their narrative tradition. It is my contention that contemporary Atlantic Canadian narratives can be seen as what political scientist Barry Cooper describes as “texts and speeches that express regional imaginative consciousness,”<sup>4</sup> and so are actively at work in constructing a region. Each imaginative rendering of place discussed in this study writes against tradition, and looks to oppose generalised stereotypes. In this sense, I use the term Atlantic Canadian not by virtue of political geography, or some simplified themes or traits, but by shared creative situation. This approach enables an illustration of how contemporary Newfoundland narratives react to cultural conditions and academic assumptions markedly similar to the rest of the Maritime Provinces. In employing the term Atlantic Canada, I shall be grouping contemporary narratives from the Atlantic Provinces to interrogate strategies of place representation. In seeking Atlantic Canadian narrative strategies, this is no call for political unity or indeed a negation of distinctive identity, but a study of shared pressures and creativities in re-placing regional tropes. This study will consider the nature of region as continually contested from both outside and inside, avoiding the erasure of identities under a regional sign.

\* \* \*

Discussing the relation of Atlantic Canadian narratives to place requires some critical history. Since the 1980s, the discussions of place and space in narrative have not always been seen on a par with other ‘constants’ in critical analysis, such as gender, sexuality race or class. However, before this period, in the era of Canadian cultural nationalism, the work of Northrop Frye, Margaret Atwood and Laurie Ricou amongst others show place to be essential to the formation of Canadian critical thought. Indeed, Linda Warley et al. assert that “in the Canadian literary context space

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<sup>4</sup> Barry Cooper ‘Regionalism, Political Culture and Canadian Political Myths’ in Keith Archer and Lisa Young (eds) *Regionalism and Party Politics in Canada*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2001) p.94

and place have always mattered.”<sup>5</sup> Canadian studies as an academic discipline has mirrored the great questions of Canadian identity, persistently and intently looking to find distinctive tropes and styles which can be heralded as Canadian. Narrative film and narrative fiction have both dwelt on the national and regional identities produced in Canadian works.<sup>6</sup> In Canadian film, *Goin’ Down the Road* (dir. Don Shebib, 1970) epitomised the trend of labour migration from the Atlantic provinces, and so crystallised a visual stereotype of Eastern Canadians on screen. In Canadian literature, this thematic pursuit was at its height in the literary criticism of the 1960s and 1970s, in response to a feared absence of national identity. This tendency fed on regional tropes to combat a genuine fear of placelessness, or valueless place. Northrop Frye only compounded matters when he replaced the standard identity question “Who am I?” with “some such riddle as ‘Where is here?’”<sup>7</sup> Despite this note of unease over articulating place, Frye himself held that there is a direct correspondence between the creator of a work and place, stating that there is “something vegetable about the creative imagination, something sharply limited in range...”<sup>8</sup> Frye’s opinion could be seen as artificial, given that it asserts art to be much like agriculture, and that logically Canada could ‘farm’ an uncomplicated national art. However, art is not agriculture, with a diversity of voices creating a less confined conception of national art. Any analysis of narrative referring to a region or nation will fail to find a schematic set of indigenous tropes. Nonetheless, it is important to see the individual voice as situated. Contemporary philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah concurs, commenting that “a tree, whatever the circumstances, does not become a legume, a vine or a cow [...] for

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<sup>5</sup> Linda Warley, John Clement Ball and Robert Viau, "Mapping the Ground" *Studies in Canadian Literature* 23.1 (Spring 1998) [12 January 2007]  
<[http://www.lib.unb.ca/Texts/SCL/Vol23\\_1/intro.html](http://www.lib.unb.ca/Texts/SCL/Vol23_1/intro.html)>

<sup>6</sup> Often this pursuit overlaps with interrogations of how ‘Canadian’ or ‘Regional’ the producer of the narrative is. This tendency has been encouraged by tests of regional or national identity related to regional and national funding in Canada.

<sup>7</sup> Northrop Frye *The Bush Garden* (Toronto: Anansi, 1970) p.220

<sup>8</sup> Ibid p.i

[an identity] to make sense, it must be an identity constructed in response to facts outside oneself, things that are beyond one's own choices."<sup>9</sup> Place then, will always be a formative part of the individual's actions and of lived experience. Literary place has the luxury of being able to adapt and refract lived experience. However, the obsession with 'roots' that this vegetative analogy suggests does not disappear. The prevalence of this strand of thought has led Leon Surette to assert that Canadian literary criticism is rife with 'topocentrism'. He defines this as the obsession "that culture is a product of physical environment."<sup>10</sup> Surette is of course right to warn of the dangers of geographical determinism. Whilst place in conventional terms may influence art, the covert geographies of gender, sexuality, race or class should not be dismissed. Nonetheless, place is more than a physical environment; it is a lived space reflective of lived experience, and encounters every one of these covert geographies. The past tendencies of place-based criticism should not prevent a contemporary possibility of a regional imaginative consciousness.

A search at once for identity and geography, left in the wake of Frye, has influenced many Canadian studies of literature and film to be grounded in terms of place. Regrettably, many of these studies in the earlier phases have been explicitly geographically determinist. W.J. Keith claims that this wave of "nationalistic thematic criticism [...was] non-literary."<sup>11</sup> This would seem a logical objection, given that much thematic criticism conflated issues of place with expectations of realism. However, in some senses DG Jones's *Butterfly on Rock*, Warren Tallman's 'Wolf in the Snow: Modern Canadian Fiction' and Margaret Atwood's *Survival* can all be seen

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<sup>9</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005) p.18

<sup>10</sup> Leon Surette, "Here is Us: The Topocentrism of Canadian Literary Criticism" *Canadian Poetry* 10 (Spring/Summer 1982) [12 January 2007] <<http://www.canadianpoetry.ca/cpjr/vol10/surette.htm>>

<sup>11</sup> W.J.Keith 'Blight in the Bush Garden: Twenty years of "CanLit"' *Essays on Canadian Writing* 71 2000 p.71 A prominent Canadian literary critic, Keith is one of the few who has explicitly surveyed a critical literary canon, and Keith's comments echo Surette's.

as supraliterary. The thematic expressions of Canadian sensibility suggested by these texts are often more well known than the very texts the thematic expressions came from, such as Atwood's Canadian 'survival mentality'. Whilst, as Phillip Marchand claims, "such Canadian intellectuals as Marshall McLuhan and Harold Innis concentrated on great theories of communication [which] downplayed content and emphasized form and process,"<sup>12</sup> this era led Canadian cultural critics prioritising the search for Canadian content over Canadian forms. The template style has been consistently assumed as realism. Here, Canadian narrative in film and literature share ground. Dorothy Livesay suggested at the end of the 1960s that the Anglo-Canadian literary tradition "is a new genre, neither epic nor narrative, but *documentary*."<sup>13</sup> In explaining this realist trait, Livesay proposes a "dialectic of objective facts and the subjective feelings"<sup>14</sup> of the author, but one heavily laden with content over form, or an abundance of "topical data."<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, Jerry White terms documentary form as "one aspect of the Canadian cinema that crosses linguistic or national divides,"<sup>16</sup> and subsequent Canadian filmic criticism has tended to deal with the vast output of documentary film produced by the Canadian National Film Board (NFB). Instincts to look to physical local place for the basis of imaginative geographies has persisted and created a slippage between regional and national content, increasingly creating problems in addressing formal innovations in representing place. The Canadian canons of film and literature have therefore been formed under similar institutional perspectives. To employ Livesay's dialectic, the comparisons of 'objective fact' from

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<sup>12</sup> Philip Marchand 'A righteous nation, a nightmare of hell' Rev. of *Canadians: A Portrait of a Country and Its People*, by Roy MacGregor. *The Toronto Star* July 1, 2007 [02 August 2007] <<http://www.thestar.com/article/231315>>

<sup>13</sup> Dorothy Livesay 'The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre' in Eli Mandel (ed.) *Contexts of Canadian Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971) p.267

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*

<sup>15</sup> *ibid* p.269

<sup>16</sup> Jerry White 'introduction' in Jerry White (ed.) *The Cinema of Canada* (London: Wallflower Press, 2006) p.1

literature to place have heavily influenced the kinds of texts that have been held up as representative of regional areas.

The material conditions of Canadian publishing have proved just as important to a notion of regional and national literary tension. How texts came to represent the region or the nation has not solely been an academic process. Instead, perception of market forces and the distribution of film and literature alike have led to certain narratives gaining prominence. To trace the first Atlantic Canadian texts that reached a national audience, flagged up as national literature, the key resource is a national print series, that of McLelland and Stewart's 'New Canadian Library' (NCL). This series, founded in 1957, features several Atlantic Canadian texts: Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and The Valley*, Thomas Raddall's *The Nymph and The Lamp*, work by Fred Bodsworth and Theodore Goodrich Roberts alongside reprints of Thomas Chandler Haliburton. The series, however, causes many conflicting critical opinions. The general editor of the series, Malcolm Ross, was a teaching academic born in New Brunswick. His belief was that a series of reprinted Canadian texts "would *create* a market in the universities and schools of the country [emphasis in the original],"<sup>17</sup> and so whilst the main goal of the series was to create a canon, it was also tied up with the aims of pedagogy, so each text would not only appear on literary merit but on academic merit. Ursula Kelly's comments on Canadian publishing neatly summarise the dual purpose of the NCL, suggesting that "Book publishers produce books as commodities to meet the perceived and real needs of potential customers. Book publishing, as a capitalist enterprise, also *constructs* need [emphasis in the original]." <sup>18</sup> At once, the series is meant to meet the real need for Canadian texts to be widely and cheaply available, and construct the need for the texts. In this commercial

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<sup>17</sup> Kathryn Chittick 'Interview With Malcolm Ross' *Studies in Canadian Literature* Volume 9.2 1984

<sup>18</sup> Ursula Kelly. *Marketing Place* (Black Point, Nova Scotia: Fernwood Books, 1993) p.29

context the NCL, which Robert Lecker later traces as becoming a library of 'classics,'<sup>19</sup> takes the form of a national canon, supplying and creating the basis of the first academic Canadian literature courses. Subsequently, Ross's assertion in a 1984 interview that "a loyalty to the region is always there--just under the skin,"<sup>20</sup> suggests that Atlantic Canadian texts were prominent for personal editorial reasons.<sup>21</sup> This is certainly the case given that since Ross's departure, the NCL has noticeably focused less on Atlantic Canadian texts. The prevalence of early Atlantic and Maritimes NCL titles could have been highly subjective.<sup>22</sup> More than this, those texts selected for the NCL from Atlantic Canada begin to play into later critical studies, creating and reinforcing regional tropes.

Janice Kulyk Keefer's critical study, *Under Eastern Eyes*, written in 1987, was the first prominent academic study of Maritime texts. The study sought to revise Canadian literature's centralising canonical tendencies, which could be seen to pay more attention to the publishing centres of Toronto and Montreal. Christopher Armstrong and Herb Wyile posit that Keefer "took the reception of [Maritime] writers as symptomatic of the suppressed political and class stakes of regional-national conflict."<sup>23</sup> However, whilst revising attitudes towards Maritime writing, Keefer created the Maritimes as a "vital literary region"<sup>24</sup> at the expense of Newfoundland. Keefer sees Patrick O'Flaherty's 1979 study, *The Rock Observed*, as proof that

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<sup>19</sup> In Robert Lecker. *Making it real: the canonization of English-Canadian literature* (Concord, Ont: Anansi, 1995)

<sup>20</sup> Kathryn Chittick 'Interview With Malcolm Ross' *Studies in Canadian Literature* Volume 9.2 1984

<sup>21</sup> Ross can also be seen as a starting point in discussing the power complicit in constructing a survey of Canadian literature.

<sup>22</sup> The contemporary editorial panel of David Staines, Alice Munro, W.H. New and Guy Vanderhaeghe has selected literature of a markedly different regional makeup.

<sup>23</sup> Christopher Armstrong and Herb Wyile. 'Firing the Regional Can(n)on: Liberal Pluralism, Social Agency, and David Adams Richards's Miramichi Trilogy' *Studies in Canadian Literature* 22.1 (Spring 1997) <[http://www.lib.unb.ca/Texts/SCL/bin/get.cgi?directory=Vol22\\_1/&filename=firinght.html](http://www.lib.unb.ca/Texts/SCL/bin/get.cgi?directory=Vol22_1/&filename=firinght.html)> [12 January 2007]

<sup>24</sup> Janice Kulyk Keefer. *Under Eastern Eyes: A Critical Reading of Maritime Fiction*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987) p.x

Newfoundland literature constitutes a separate literary region, drawing reference to O'Flaherty's central themes to suggest that "if there is a shibboleth which distinguishes Newfoundland from the Maritimes, it must surely be 'Outport', with its associations of an epic struggle against starvation and the sea."<sup>25</sup> Fixed firmly on realist content, Keefer sees the absence of "sustained visions of imminent or actual Arcadia"<sup>26</sup> as a barrier to comparing Newfoundland and Maritime literature. Whilst deepening the Maritimes/Atlantic division, Keefer's study highlights many 'regional texts' that were published through the NCL. This decision simultaneously reinforces Ross' previous editorial choices, and implicitly both the canonical merit of the NCL and the canonical merit of Maritime literature. Furthermore, whilst being revisionary, Keefer follows the institutional terms of debate and so elevates regional realist narratives. Regional realism then poses more problems. Firstly, the realist narrative creates a further tendency to read for place, reinforcing part of the prejudice that is being revised, with the readership seeing "the place on which it concentrates [...] to lack social, cultural and economic significance."<sup>27</sup> Regional realism has often dealt with regional employment, and has therefore focused on primary industries such as mining, fishing and logging. These industries begin to appear dated in the context of a post-industrial world. Secondly, the form of realism in the 1980s is seen as dated in the academic and literary worlds, in the wake of modernism and postmodernism.<sup>28</sup> Keefer herself laments this, noting that "the texts which make up a Maritime canon [...] suffer from [...] being] critically outmoded and commercially popular: the idyll, historical romance, and that current literary leper – the realist or representational

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<sup>25</sup> Keefer, op. cit. p.4

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*

<sup>27</sup> Kelly, op. cit. p.31

<sup>28</sup> Although Canadian criticism has been overwhelmingly realist, by the 1980s postmodern interrogation of subjectivity and 'objective' fact leads to a range of experiments with artistic form.

novel.”<sup>29</sup> The elevation of critically outmoded genres contributes to a conventional academic view of Atlantic Canada as ‘belonging to a past era.’ Ian McKay explores the social construction of this view by tracing the trope of the ‘folk’ in the literature and culture in Nova Scotia.<sup>30</sup> Focusing on rural rustic workers in realist narratives, documentary film and photography, McKay shows how Nova Scotian, and with logical extension Atlantic Canadian, people have consistently been portrayed as antimodern. McKay then suggests this trope is reinforced by more recent forms of nostalgia and pastness. In this context, Keefer’s genres can be seen as reinscribing this pastness, as historical writing provides another strong strand of regional writing.

The most recent critical overview pertinent to Atlantic Canadian literature, David Creelman’s *Setting in the East*, written in 2003, again makes the distinction between Maritime and Atlantic Canada, choosing to see Newfoundland as “a very different set of cultural and ideological tensions [...and] a regional literature distinct in itself.”<sup>31</sup> Creelman’s study also chooses to repeat Keefer’s assertion that contemporary Maritime fiction is primarily realist, claiming “Realism has become the most important set of literary conventions in the region.”<sup>32</sup> In choosing both of these perspectives, Creelman relies on past conventions at the expense of a contemporary writing community, neglecting the formal innovations of writers such as Lynn Coady who feature simply to make the point that contemporary regional writers deconstruct ideas of patriarchy. Overall, Creelman’s reliance on historical forces as part of his assertion of Newfoundland’s difference fails to take note of what Gerald Friesen’s claim that “what constituted a [Canadian] region and determined its boundaries has

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<sup>29</sup> Keefer, op. cit. p.6

<sup>30</sup> Ian McKay *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal; London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994)

<sup>31</sup> David Creelman *Setting in the East: Maritime Realist Fiction* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003) p.3

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p.4 In the time Creelman is writing, oppositional regional assertions need not be addressed in centralized institutional terms, and therefore it is surprising that realism is the foundation of his text.



not been consistent from one generation to the next.”<sup>33</sup> Contemporary Atlantic Canadian narratives are, whilst inevitably writing in response to the past, also responding to an era of globalisation. I argue that Creelman has failed to see the contemporary similarities in writing from across Atlantic Canada, through the kinds of issues writers face in representing place. Not only does the writing community in Atlantic Canada have more methods of communication than in the past, but the national and international recognition of regional authors affects the publication, readership and therefore the very form of subsequent writing. The NCL is no longer the sole national gauge of canon formation, with much writing from regional presses achieving national and international acclaim. Furthermore, more writers than ever are asserting themselves as Atlantic Canadian writers, not to be ‘put in place’ by a critic but to claim place for themselves.

The politics of claiming place, or reading place into narrative, are often blurred by philosophical questions concerning intention, creation and representation. In foregrounding the connection to geography I do not propose to regard “the author [as] more important as social identity than as a [...] paragon of literary excellence” as Herb Wyile and Christopher Armstrong warn contemporary studies may suggest.<sup>34</sup> However, literary excellence is a notoriously difficult quality to define. In negotiating these two poles of identity and representation, I do not intend to read the author as the region. Naturally, speeches and texts which reimagine an emergent regional consciousness are contentious, as they situate the individual voice as representative of the group. Using any author or character as direct representations of regional identity could risk placing the author as a conduit or a spokesperson for the entire region. Such

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<sup>33</sup> Gerald Friesen ‘The Evolving Meanings of Region in Canada’ *The Canadian Historical Review* 82:3 2001 p.530

<sup>34</sup> Armstrong and Wyile. Op. cit. Implicitly, Wyile and Armstrong are questioning the rationale with which Keefer looked to revise the history of Maritime literature. However, opposition to centralised ideas of literary excellence are always bound to receive this charge.

positioning can make the regional study elide all which does not fit the particular individual's regional conception of identity. This does precisely what Frank Davey criticised in nationalist literary criticism in the 1970s, in that it promotes "a gentleman's club inside which any member can speak piously on behalf of the rest of the group."<sup>35</sup> Davey's gendering of the club highlights how such communities can become read as male or female just as readily as congealing around rules. Such communities ultimately refuse admission to identities unwelcome within their myth. Nevertheless, texts which express regional consciousness must be considered closely. I follow George Elliott Clarke in his assertion that "Art is never innocent, even if artists claim naïveté; it has socio-political effects, and so it has socio-political consequences."<sup>36</sup> Any text situated in Atlantic Canada which achieves a wide readership, will attract questions of representation based upon the historical, national and regional oppression of Atlantic voices.

Here the key issues of contemporary Atlantic Canada emerge. Frank Davey posits that for "a regionalism to prosper and persist within a contemporary capitalist nation-state some commodification of that regionalism must occur"<sup>37</sup>, and then subsequently cites Anne of Green Gables as an Atlantic 'mytho-cultural' commodification. Contemporary narratives, which discuss everyday lived experience, must be aware of this commodification. Wylie sees this acceptance in the work of Lynn Coady, citing her as "a good example of Atlantic-Canadian literature's increasing and subversive self-consciousness, foregrounding and deconstructing the

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<sup>35</sup> Frank Davey. 'Surviving the Paraphrase' in *Surviving the Paraphrase: Eleven Essays on Canadian Literature* (Winnipeg, Man: Turnstone Press, 1983) p.4

<sup>36</sup> George Elliott Clarke, 'Poetic Rule' in *The Walrus* (April 2006) [07 April 2007]  
<<http://www.walrusmagazine.com/articles/politics-poetic-rule/>>

<sup>37</sup> Frank Davey 'Toward the Ends of Regionalism' in Christian Riegel and Herb Wylie (eds.) *A Sense of Place* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1998) p.12

way in which Canada's eastern edge tends to be framed from the outside.”<sup>38</sup> Self-conscious Atlantic Canadian literature emerges via a contemporary awareness that narratives are constrained and constructed in different ways through different audiences. Outside perspectives on Atlantic Canadian literature can just as easily be Canadian national perspectives, co-opting regional literature as national. The often controversial Canadian literary critic Stephen Henighan suggests just this when he posits that “by the late 1990s it seemed that only writers from Atlantic Canada – Wayne Johnston, Alistair MacLeod, David Adams Richards – still wrote Canadian novels.”<sup>39</sup> Not only does Henighan co-opt regional identity to support his concept of a disappearing Canadian literature in an age of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), but he also draws attention to the phenomenon of historical fiction – what has lately been referred to in its most self-knowing forms as historiographic metafiction.

One would like to think Henighan sees Johnston, MacLeod and Adams Richards as most fittingly Canadian, because their historical fiction is intensely grounded in particular Atlantic places. However, it is also for their location of narrative in the past that Henighan has chosen these particular figures. This is confirmed by a subsequent statement on the condition of Canadian literature which he defines as currently being set “in other countries, in the Canadian past, or in parts of Atlantic Canada where the present can be made to feel like the past.”<sup>40</sup> The trope which Ian McKay has pointed to as overtly commercially constructed, is believed by

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<sup>38</sup> Herb Wyile ‘As for Me and Me Arse: Strategic Regionalism and the Home Place in Lynn Coady’s *Strange Heaven*’ *Canadian Literature* 189:85 2006

<sup>39</sup> Stephen Henighan, *When Words Deny the World* (Erin, Ontario: The Porcupine’s Quill, 2002) p. Incidentally, Henighan’s confidence in knowing what is and what isn’t a Canadian novel would seem somewhat brash given the suggestion by MG Vassanji, in his recent provocative article for *Canadian Literature* 190 entitled ‘Am I a Canadian Author?’, that to pursue this question will only lead to “bewildered...simplistic or outdated notions”

<sup>40</sup> Stephen Henighan ‘Writing the City’ *Geist* < <http://www.geist.com/opinion?id=29> > [12 January 2007]

Henighan. Trusting Atlantic Canada to be antimodern, Henighan sees it as a comforting insulation to the implicit harbingers of placelessness. As Zoe Druick posits, “the root of Canadian placelessness is often attributed not only to American consumer culture, but also to the coeval disruptions of immigration, euphemistically known in recent years as multiculturalism,”<sup>41</sup> and so here Henighan has found in the underdeveloped narrative ‘pastness’ of Atlantic Canada a haven of antimodern sentiment, traditionally disassociated from the multiculturalism of much larger areas of urbanisation.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, regional identity as backward, or lagging behind, can be constructed at a national level as a reactionary response to forces now associated with globalisation; free trade, increased commercialisation and increased migration.

So, anxiety towards authentic regional portrayals within narratives is based in a real climate of outside appropriation. Historical fiction’s prevalence in Atlantic Canadian literature does not seemingly help this situation. History itself is not of course a regressive subject. Atlantic Canada, before the contemporary period of globalisation, is available to select and subvert, mythologizing at a safe distance from the problems that writing in the contemporary region creates. Historical fiction can be radical in the ways it reforms ideas of region, but the popularity of its consumption could suggest a less knowing readership, and a more ready acceptance towards reconstituted stereotypes. If historical fiction is a safer method of ‘recovering the idea of home’, it is also a safer method of commodification, and as we see in Henighan’s statement, “the commodification of the regionalism may serve only to enrich national

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<sup>41</sup> Zoe Druick ‘Framing the Local’ in Garry Sherbert, Annie Gerin, and Sheila Petty (eds.) *Canadian Cultural Poesis* (Waterloo, Ont. : Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005) p.88

<sup>42</sup> Noticably, Henighan avoids Ann-Marie Macdonald within this survey, whose debut novel *Fall On Your Knees* (1997), opened the Lebanese Atlantic Canadian immigrant voice from the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century to an international audience. Selecting particular regional authors will always construct a different message.

cultural industries and to prop up national canonicity.”<sup>43</sup> Equally, the repetition of the past in regional narrative perpetuates the very nostalgic climate which even the best historical fiction seeks to rewrite, given that “representational practises, such as the visual media [or literature are...] constitutive aspects of our experience of self and place.”<sup>44</sup>

E. Annie Proulx’s *The Shipping News*, written in 1993 and later filmed on Newfoundland, creates similar issues in relation to the authenticity of representation. Proulx, an American, won the Pulitzer-Prize for *The Shipping News* but set the novel in Newfoundland. Issues with Proulx’s contemporary representations of Newfoundland refer to both film and novel. Both forms of the narrative provoke disquiet amongst the regional community for appropriating dialect, and commodifying regional identity. Furthermore, the widespread sale of *The Shipping News* in Newfoundland produces the same conditions as a region saturated by historical fiction, in that contested representations come, through commerce, to be seen as dominant representations. It is in this double bind of expressing identity, against both outside forces of appropriation and homogenisation, that contemporary narrative representations contend. Roland Robertson, champion of the critical term which merges these two positions, ‘glocalization’, contends that a type of argument between “global homogenization versus heterogenization should be transcended.”<sup>45</sup> Robertson believes that identity should not necessarily be a polarised contest of spreading mass culture versus bounded and resistant independent culture. This study will look to chart contemporary writing from Atlantic Canada which tries to navigate

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<sup>43</sup> Davey op. cit. p.12-13

<sup>44</sup> Druick op. cit. p.89-90

<sup>45</sup> Robertson, Roland. ‘Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity’ in Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash and Roland Robertson (eds.) *Global Modernities* (London: Sage, 1995) p. 27

these challenges, representing the region despite the many forces of tradition, globalisation and commerce.

The study first focuses on Lynn Coady's edited literary anthology *Victory Meat* (2003), investigating both the formal requirements and the politics of representation that a contemporary regional anthology suggests. Coady asserts that canonical assumptions towards Atlantic Canadian art create "very real limitations [...] on artists and writers in the province."<sup>46</sup> Therefore, this section interrogates Coady's polemic introduction alongside the anthology's texts looking to see how thoroughly Coady's own views are supported by the chosen texts. Subsequently, the study turns to longer narratives by contributors to *Victory Meat*. The second chapter looks at Lisa Moore's *Alligator* (2005) and Christy Ann Conlin's *Heave* (2002), and the strategies developed in representing contemporary regional place. Moore's discussion of Proulx informs much of how she develops her idea of St. John's, with the visual and quotidian as important as local idiom. Conlin's *Heave* is radically different to her contribution in *Victory Meat*, focusing on the present as a continuation, and continual engagement with the past. Chapter three focuses on a recent Atlantic Canadian film which has garnered international acclaim. *Whole New Thing* (2006), co-written by regional playwright Daniel MacIvor and directed by film professor Amnon Buchbinder, is a rarity, given that it is filmed and produced by a largely regional team. The section therefore looks to situate *Whole New Thing* in a tradition of regional film, and suggests how the piece's contemporaneity and success may not make it as radical as initially thought. The final chapter returns to literary narratives, analysing strategies of place representation in two texts by another contributor to *Victory Meat*, Michael Winter. Winter's *This All Happened* (2001) and *The Big Why* (2004) are both

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<sup>46</sup> From personal correspondence with Lynn Coady. Please see Appendix A for a full transcript.

imaginative Newfoundland geographies, which question the boundaries of representation, realism and historical fiction. Each section suggests a differing strategy to the same problem, as each regional narrative engages in re-placing regional tropes and expressing contemporary Atlantic Canadian regional identity.

## 1. Tearing apart *Victory Meat*: What is New Fiction from Atlantic Canada?

Lynn Coady's contemporary Atlantic Canadian anthology entitled *Victory Meat: New Fiction from Atlantic Canada* can be seen as both a counter to the sorts of commodified stereotypes that Frank Davey suggests regions necessitate, and a treatise on how to move past these in literary narratives. Coady imagines a regional Atlantic Canadian consciousness in editing a series of short stories, sixteen years after Keefer's scepticism towards a coherent Atlantic Canadian literature. Employing Keefer's scheme of redress to draw attention to a set of regional viewpoints would be to compare a range of stereotypes, traceable preconceptions supposedly held by a centralist literary criticism, and then undercut those using examples from the texts. Unfortunately, such attempts are fraught with problems in performance and counter-performance of bounded identity. Coady tries to balance these problems with the contemporary perspective in her editorial to *Victory Meat*, which serves as a manifesto on moving Atlantic Canada past all solidified ideas of identity. Atlantic Canada today is of course caught between redressing its relationship to national identity and the processes of globalisation which sets the local directly on terms with the global. Coady's preface looks to explain just this, claiming "we say 'arse' [but] we also use email, collect Air-Miles and have the entire third season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* on DVD,"<sup>1</sup> and in doing so identifies contemporary identity as necessarily belonging to a contemporary climate of globalisation. *Victory Meat* looks to challenge and suggest responses to the representation of region in the contemporary period.

Lynn Coady's introduction to *Victory Meat: New Fiction from Atlantic Canada* is notably clear about the collection's stance in relation to the perception of

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn Coady (ed.) *Victory Meat: New Fiction from Atlantic Canada* (Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2003) p. 3 Hereafter referred to in the text as [VM].



literature from Atlantic Canada. Coady sought out texts which were nothing to do with ‘At-Can Myths’, texts which deliberately were not “about *home*, about belonging – extended families, close-knit communities, and a shared cultural language and identity.” [VM 4] In countering and subverting what she terms “reductive attitudes by the public at large,”<sup>2</sup> Coady’s anthology is linked by its desire to be contemporary, original and revisionary to traditional notions of Atlantic Canadian literature.

Given this thematic organisation, it is important to see the collection in its publishing context. As with the NCL and the recent anthologies from Atlantic Canada: *Atlantica* (2001) and *The Atlantic Anthology* (1984), Coady’s anthology can be seen as a revisionary statement to perceived canons, and a hint to who the ‘canonical’ figures of contemporary Atlantic Canadian literature are. As a statement, Coady’s preface is clear on intent; however, an accumulation of texts seldom follows one clear message and the texts included in *Victory Meat* prove both ambiguous and provocative in adherence to that message. Canonical values are, to Robert Lecker, “necessarily political”<sup>3</sup> and so present a multiplicity of questions regarding representation. Regional anthologies, by their collection of voices under a thematic banner are also necessarily political, collaborating as they are in a canon forming process. *Victory Meat* was published in 2003 by Anchor Canada, a Canadian imprint of the global publishing consortium Random House. Regional anthologies by major publishing houses are seldom seen, therefore Coady’s anthology could suggest a number of things. It could suggest that contemporary regional literature is a public issue and not simply an academic pursuit, and this would be reflected in the wide reviewing of the collection. It could in turn suggest that Atlantic Canadian literature is

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<sup>2</sup> Lynn Coady in James Cowan ‘Writing beyond Green Gables: *Victory Meat*: Coady’s collection of Atlantic fiction punctures stereotypes’ *National Post* June 17<sup>th</sup> 2003

<sup>3</sup> Robert Lecker. *Making it real: the canonization of English-Canadian literature* (Concord, Ont: Anansi, 1995) p.11

profitable, and worth producing in Toronto. However, many would see outsider production as being loaded with the power relationship of a centralist to a margin. The weight of a national/centralist, implicitly global, publishing house collecting ‘new’ regional voices posits a risk of appropriation, and a danger that outsider publishing will be antithetical to regional expression. Yet defining from the inside, in these concrete terms, is near impossible. Danielle Fuller notes that small regional presses no longer have the financial support to publish such collections despite “collections of new writing by unknown writers [being]... probably the most culturally valuable publications to their local communities.”<sup>4</sup> Fuller goes on to see these collections as valuable because they conduct “bridging work between non-ruling and ruling relations of power.”<sup>5</sup> In seeing Anchor Canada’s publication of *Victory Meat* as bridging a ‘ruling’ publisher and non-ruling voices, the relationship could simply be one of promotion, of mutual benefit. However, within such a paradigm, Coady as editor becomes crucial for her ability to mediate the selection, and so agency, of regional voices. Within the theoretical notion of bridging is an ambiguous dispersal of control. Coady’s selectivity supposedly subdues any direct commercial impulse, with her rejection of authors “for silly and arbitrary – seeming reasons such as ‘you’re too well established,’” [VM 199] and yet the volume trades from Coady’s own establishment as ‘author of the bestselling *Saints of Big Harbour*.’ The demand to be populist, created by Coady’s own popular cultural capital, and the demand to be original, create an interesting context to how revisionary ‘New Fiction from Atlantic Canada’ can realistically be.

Coady introduces the collection by stating that “our writing could be just as true, vivid, and familiar without following the over-trod paths hacked out for us in

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<sup>4</sup> Danielle Fuller *Writing the everyday: women's textual communities in Atlantic Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004) p.249

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

days gone by – paths that served their purpose at one time, but have since been made redundant by the advent of planes, trains and automobiles.” [VM 4-5] This does not mean that Lynn Coady writes as a conduit for her region, but that her intention is to rally a generation against what she sees as a redundant “eastern Canadian formula” [VM 4] which has crept into literature. This belief posits a fracturing between text and world, whereby the literary representations of the region have become so self-perpetuating so as to have lost touch with the real world. Subsequently, Coady’s selection of texts refrains from reducing to any set of criteria what an Atlantic Canadian writer must be. Instead, Coady’s collection is a tentative step between academic regional redress, couched in terms of stereotypes, and a literary response to contemporary Atlantic Canada. In Coady’s criteria, this fiction is noteworthy because “it’s just so good,” and because of its “iconoclastic core.” [VM 5] All anthologies employ some scale of judgement, to narrow selection and to avoid the belief of inherent value in every ‘regional’ text. However, how fiction becomes ‘good’ is a subjective and critical can of worms. This subjective treatment of value does not mean in turn that editing is relative, for such a belief would see art as a naïve formation. Instead, in following Roy Miki it should be questioned how detached value judgement is from the reinscribing of established conventions, suggesting that “the editor who begins by saying [...they] will publish the ‘best’ of contemporary writing is not divested of interest, but may (unwittingly or not) be subscribing to standards of prevailing social and institutional expectations.”<sup>6</sup> What is ‘good’ may not always be seen as ‘original.’

It is Coady’s second condition, selecting texts that are ‘iconoclastic,’ which reveals the anthology’s claim for originality. For Coady, “stereotypes, no matter how

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<sup>6</sup> Roy Miki *Broken Entries* (Toronto: Mercury Press, 1998) p.38

well intentioned, are ultimately never compliments,” [VM 1] although surely there should be more room for discussion in such a statement. To those traditionally disempowered and marginalised, surely a template through which to become known and popularly associated with would actually be a liberating device. Theorist Terry Eagleton, in discussing stereotypes, suggests two things that might be pertinent to such an argument. Eagleton believes “the case for stereotypes is a materialist one,”<sup>7</sup> and so if we are to assume that Atlantic fiction has any shared basis in the real world, then we are constructing a belief that material conditions effect some particular identities or practices. He then suggests that in fact stereotyping can be positive by asserting “that power is always objectionable [...] is not a view that the powerless generally share.”<sup>8</sup> Perhaps collective claims towards stereotyping made by Coady must then be seen under a very specific banner, i.e. that of contemporary regional artists. Contemporary readers may well feel comfortable with the representations which are constructed in ‘formulaic’ fiction; however, repeated patterns constrict the ‘originality’ of creativity. Where Eagleton may of course be inappropriate here, is that he is not suggesting such stereotypes as commodities. The cultural currency received for producing formulaic images of regional identity reduces identity to a strict sale value.<sup>9</sup> This leads Coady to apply a framework of aversion to stereotype to those texts chosen, seeing Lisa Moore’s short story ‘Melody’ as “driving the reader right up to the door of a less media-friendly aspect of eastern Canada – parochial and moralizing.” [VM 5] The emphasis is on writing against the loaded images that tourism or the media desires, seeking a literary confrontation with convention. This process of rewriting Atlantic Canadian identity is made explicit by Coady’s

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<sup>7</sup> Terry Eagleton ‘Have you seen my Dada boss?’ Rev. of *Typecasting: On the Arts and Sciences of Human Inequality*, by Elizabeth Ewen and Stuart Ewen *London Review of Books* 28:23 30<sup>th</sup> November 2006 p.9

<sup>8</sup> *ibid* p.10

<sup>9</sup> It is also worth remembering that tangible economic currency exists alongside this cultural currency.

opposition to “the well-meaning architects of nostalgia and sentiment.” [VM 5] While opposing such a group of architects, Coady’s perceived audience is much wider, believing “you will enjoy it no matter where in the world you are.” [VM 4] This acknowledgement of a global market could be seen as a manner of rebranding, yet reinscribing regional literature. However, the true strength of the anthology on its own terms may resist such a reading of the preface, by resisting a reduction to any core ‘brand.’

The collection is dark and frequently takes reference to place, but seldom makes the argument that Creelman and Keefer make in their respective academic pleas for Atlantic Canadian canonical consideration. This is because the texts in *Victory Meat* are self aware, drawing attention to themselves as fiction. The levels of fantasy, darkness, violence and individual isolation jar against the previous tropes of Atlantic Canadian mimesis and the home place. Most consistently, textual innovation is achieved through a question of genre rather than form, mostly a symptom of the volume’s need to accumulate short stories.<sup>10</sup> Should representation be pursued as directly via social identity of the contributing authors, perhaps a glaring omission could be noted early on. Despite Coady’s claim to subvert the assumptions of ‘Road to Avonlea’ country, [VM 1] there is no direct counter narrative supplied by an author with connections to Prince Edward Island. Even still most contributions to the collection are not the romantic childhood affair that *Anne of Green Gables* was, and each certainly imposes its own violation on the ideas of contented and innocent folk that linger long in the cultural memory.<sup>11</sup> Neither conventionally ‘innocent’ or a member of ‘the folk’, Maharaj’s opening short fiction sets the scene for a totally different perspective on Atlantic Canada. So often the tale of ‘goin’ down the road’ is

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<sup>10</sup> However, there is no concrete reasoning behind the neglect of poetry other than the volume deciding to focus on fiction.

<sup>11</sup> Despite Ian McKay’s excellent deconstruction of the category.

associated with the East coast; however, here Maharaj sets up the tale of a disillusioned immigrant to Fredericton, New Brunswick. In 'Bitches on All Sides'<sup>12</sup> the reader is immediately thrown into the transnational narrative of the displaced Ramjohn. Echoes of a previous life and place haunt him as he seeks out the worst of Fredericton, in an attempt to find "more immediate irritants" [VM 7] in the everyday. Such a search highlights the manner of Ramjohn's brutal self identity, needing to find grievances through which to build a resilient and strong sense of self. This pursuit of irritation is at once comic and macabre as Ramjohn sets out on an anti-guide to Fredericton, exposing the plight of the immigrant to a region more used to workers dispersing. Ramjohn projects his feelings of oppression onto the name of the place itself, so that in an almost Orwellian manner, he sees "slowly, the notion that the whole of Fredericton was involved in some kind of conspiracy against him." [VM 15] Gradually the excess Ramjohn goes to in order to be angry makes him question the nature of reality, dreams and conscious behaviour. The ambiguous ending leaves us none the wiser as to which vows Ramjohn has made, but we are certain that his acceptance of another person enables the evasion of the depressing cycle of consistent self-masochism.

Lee D. Thompson's 'The Whales'<sup>13</sup> is an example of a disregard for realistic mimesis. Poetic in language, and peppered with reference to the ocean and to real street names, Thompson's narrative is a dream-like tale of whales who migrate to the suburbs. In this fantasy, "the younger whale ripples to our driveway, flattens our prickly hedges" [VM 135] seemingly looking to reconnect nature and the oft-imagined bland anaesthetised vision of suburbia. Yet the fantasy turns into a

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<sup>12</sup> Rabindranath Maharaj. 'Bitches on All Sides' in Lynn Coady (ed.) *Victory Meat* (Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2003) pp.7-23

<sup>13</sup> Lee D. Thompson. 'The Whales' in Lynn Coady (ed.) *Victory Meat* (Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2003) pp.131-138

nightmare as the last lines hint towards a cull of these fragile symbols, “I will pray for the sleeping children, whose hearts are innocent of all this, and who will soon wake to hear the shrill engines of slicing chainsaws...” [VM 138] This is not conventional prose in the tradition of Buckler or Raddall, and in using a form of fable the writing shows a confidence in self reference. The home place, that other bastion of Atlantic Canadian literature is similarly invaded in unexpected ways, using iconic themes of the East coast, the whales and the ocean, and yet evading ‘real’ life. Still, the action is a threat to stability. Meanwhile the active reference to the Mall parking lot sees an air of development and contemporaneity. This is not a story which invokes the past in any conventional sense, only in mythologising the whales’ “deep racial memory [...] for their distant ancestors were once landbound.” [VM 133] Trauma and natural angst instead preoccupy the family as they cling to the remnants of some absurd nostalgia.

Meanwhile, Peter Norman’s ‘Blameless’<sup>14</sup> is written as a realistic and mimetic short fiction, setting up a specific place of action: “Queensland Beach was hopping. A bunch of guys were in from Halifax with girls and loud cars.” [VM 121] Built up as a summer aimlessly spent, the narrative quickly spirals into the bullying of a local with special needs, Robert, and a cursory almost casual violence. The betrayal of Robert’s father’s trust adds to the vacuum of moral conduct as Norman’s characters are revealed to be merely tight-knit in appearance. The balance of a supposed friendship is seen after a violent incident and a following “‘How’s it going?’ he said, like nothing had ever happened.” [VM 130] This revelation of cutting cruelty destabilises the notion that there is any economic or social reasoning behind the violence. Neither protagonist cites the decline in employment and quality of life as reasoning for violence. Instead, Norman more worryingly conveys the everyday presence of

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Norman. ‘Blameless’ in Lynn Coady (ed.) *Victory Meat* (Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2003) pp.121-130

malevolence as evil. This again seems to fit Coady's 'make it new and uncommercial' ethos.

However there are some works in the collection which seem actively resistant to such demands. Michael Winter is one such author. Winter's piece introduces us to the author's alter-ego Gabriel English, and this the hyper realism of the roman-à-clef form. Winter's 'Second Heart'<sup>15</sup> is a narrative concerned with family betrayal and ethical moose hunting. The vivid description of moose hunting visceral enough to undo fuzzy notions of cute moose: "Junior pulls a knife from the back of his belt and tucks it under his throat. He rummages until a red gush pours over his hand," [VM 79] However, the subtle family gothic which spins out over the course of the tale seems in keeping with more conservative contemporary writers from the region such as David Adams Richards. Here, the themes practically mirror Richards' own, with violence, betrayal and the masculine in the family all accessible. The short text does not frame Gabriel as in any respect connected to Winter, and this presentation negates the strength of the text's innovation. Only in a glance at the end of the author bibliographies are we told "He loves it when readers assume he writes autobiography, although his family and friends are less pleased." [VM 198] This attempt to refer to the context late on limits the scope of Winter's text to fulfil Coady's aims.

Kelly Cooper's 'Conjugal Approaches'<sup>16</sup> does seem to undermine a tourist version of the folk trope, historicising the self-help sex book into the frame of "the floor of my great-grandparents' abandoned farmhouse." [VM 173] The implications of this become clear as sex seeps out from the past: "the book is a study in euphemism. I have it still, read it for words like *onanism* and *thraldom*." [VM 174]

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Winter. 'Second Heart' in Lynn Coady (ed.) *Victory Meat* (Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2003) pp.77-92

<sup>16</sup> Kelly Cooper. 'Conjugal Approaches' in Lynn Coady (ed.) *Victory Meat* (Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2003) pp.173-178



The quaint thus becomes rewritten in less than innocent ways. The only evocations of place in Cooper's fiction are those of the everyday patterns of the great-grandparents, milking, tending to the farm, and the abstract relations of the female narrator in the present. This sentimental mockery lacks the traditions of reverence that other regional historical narratives have taken. Thus, Cooper's narrative is clearly chosen for its undermining of wider stereotypes over any clear specificity of location. Arguably, this is a contribution to Coady's attempts to see Atlantic Canada as an unproblematic region, facing similarly misguided notions of commercial identity. The inclusion of George Elliott Clarke and Rabindranath Maharaj could be perceived as tokenistic representation, a gesturing towards diversity, were it not for Maharaj's story both opening and supposedly serving as inspiration for the collection. Maharaj's tale subverts a cosy communal idea of Halifax, Nova Scotia. Similarly, Elliott Clarke's work is focused on Halifax, drawing all manner of sexual allusions alongside the specific site. The narrative, 'Identifying the Muses,'<sup>17</sup> is a first person confession by a Nova Scotian detective gesturing towards a collection of literary sexually explicit characters and authors. After expanding on diverse references from western literature, alongside "Nova Scotia girls...kilted, svelte and cunning," [VM 116] Elliott Clarke draws together all the western artists as guilty of similar vice. In conclusion, to the detective it seems "it's no excuse to say that this hell is Halifax," [VM 118] and instead there is a conclusion that all places contain depravity. This leads to the final breakdown between reader and narrator as the detective asserts "my secret is, really, *I am like you.*" [VM 119] All place identities are then dragged into the same cauldron-like mind, of a detective in love with vice's proliferation. This short fiction appears highly embellished and affected and as such comes nowhere near traditional concepts

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<sup>17</sup> George Elliott Clarke. 'Identifying the Muses' in Lynn Coady (ed.) *Victory Meat* (Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2003) pp.113-119

of mimesis. This, and the insertion of Nova Scotia into a literary history which moves all over the western world would be just one duty of the included text. To see either Elliott Clarke's or Maharaj's work as present for a pretension of diversity would be to read the text in a different manner. Christopher Armstrong and Herb Wyile make the argument that attempts to read an anthology politically tend to focus on the social identity of the author above the relevant textual contribution.<sup>18</sup> This negates the myriad other identity-constructing factors and the fact that fictional voice is always a construction and so no more authentic for tracing back to the author. This also misses the point of the anthology, the fiction itself.

RM Vaughan is explicitly counter Atlantic-Canadian tradition, with his fantasy gothic tale 'Saint Brendan's'<sup>19</sup> narrating Sterling's homecoming to the East coast. The scenery of the area is expressed in grotesque terms, as the silt is termed "Greenish-grey, thick as fudge, and putrid as the bowels of a dogfish," [VM 159] and all projects that have ever been undertaken to clean the silt are seen as cursed given how "silt dumped high in the woods behind neighbouring Maynard's Corner killed several families of deer and eleven acres of juvenile spruce trees." [VM 160] In a bizarre twist, despite letters of concern from his estranged wife, Stirling ends up being sacrificed by a ring of locals to a large sea monster, which indecorously "wrapped a leathery fin around Sterling's head, jerked it backward and snapped his windpipe." [VM 171] Certain reviews have seen this tale, with hints at medication and uncharacteristic behaviour as a narrative of failing mental health; however, the failure to provide such context explicitly renders the story unclosed to such conciliatory analyses. Instead, Sterling, as the father, is irreparably separated from his

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<sup>18</sup> Christopher Armstrong and Herb Wyile 'Firing the regional can(n)on' in *Studies in Canadian Literature* (22:1) 1997 p.4

<sup>19</sup> RM Vaughan. 'Saint Brendan's' in Lynn Coady (ed.) *Victory Meat* (Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2003) pp.157-172

family and left to die a death from a cheap horror movie. Such a descent seems plausible given the patient build up of local detail, allowing the reader a position similar to Sterling, unsettled outsider observing the alien practises of the local people. Fundamentally though, this short fiction raises large questions of what role place plays in explicit fantasy, almost to the extent of unreality. How do we look at the representation of place when the actions and practises enacted in fictional space neither tie in to previous texts or the regional context of the setting?

The demolition of the Atlantic Canadian homeplace in Coady's collection seems to be a grander repetition of Herb Wyile's assertions on Coady's first novel, *Strange Heaven*. Wyile makes the comment that Atlantic-Canadian literature has an "increasing and subversive self-consciousness, foregrounding and deconstructing the way in which Canada's eastern edge tends to be framed from outside."<sup>20</sup> Each text Coady includes explicitly challenges a comforting notion of the East coast, despite the mixed messages that varying forms of writing create. The balance of mimetic and non-mimetic writing invited to this anthology means those texts which have not conventionally "been encoded with the appropriate ideology ([...]mimetic),"<sup>21</sup> such as Vaughan's horror genre fiction and Elliott Clarke's literary detective story, are given a much wider audience and are invited into a regional canonical environment. Coady undercuts the presumptions of what an anthology must be in subtle ways, allowing the texts themselves to suggest links and discontinuities with her rallying 'no fetishising and no ostracising' cries. The importance of region to this volume may not at first seem apparent; however, the critical role of each fiction is to unveil a small curtain towards its part of the region and to do so in a challenging form. In this sense, the tradition and individuality so loved by TS Eliot are still the foundation of truly

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<sup>20</sup> Herb Wyile 'As For Me and Me Arse: Strategic Regionalism and the Home Place in Lynn Coady's *Strange Heaven*' in *Canadian Literature* (189) 2006 p. 85

<sup>21</sup> Lecker op. cit. p.123

progressive anthologies, and thus Katherine Morrison's comments that "a sense of place in literature tends to be of little significance unless it implies the past"<sup>22</sup> are challenged. Instead, Coady's collection looks to define sense of place only from a presumption of past regional literary traditions. Contemporary settings in Coady's anthology evade the historical narrative.

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<sup>22</sup> Katherine L. Morrison *Canadians are not Americans: myths and literary traditions* (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2003) p.133

## 2. Authenticity, Home and the Regional debate: Lisa Moore's *Alligator* and Christy Ann Conlin's *Heave*

Following Lynn Coady's assertion of an Atlantic Canadian writing consciousness, this chapter looks at the first novels of two writers featured in the *Victory Meat* anthology; Lisa Moore and Christy Ann Conlin. Lisa Moore is a writer from Newfoundland whose contribution to *Victory Meat*, 'Melody', is taken from her second short story collection *Open*. This collection put Moore on the literary map in Canada, attracting a nomination for the Giller Prize,<sup>1</sup> the Winterset Award<sup>2</sup> and winning the Canadian Authors' Association Prize for short fiction. Moore's debut novel *Alligator* is set in St. John's, Newfoundland, echoing the setting of her two previous short story collections.<sup>3</sup> *Alligator* also echoes these collections with its formal arrangement, gathering over thirty short narratives of eleven characters together as each character crosses paths in the contemporary city. Most commentary on the novel has focused on style, paying attention to the poetic resonance of Moore's detailed observation. Moore's own comments have tended towards reading *Alligator* as an expression of St. John's and in particular the diverse chorus of voices that constitutes a community. Christy Ann Conlin's *Heave* also focuses on Atlantic Canadian community, detailing the coming of age of Seraphina Sullivan in the Annapolis Valley, Nova Scotia.<sup>4</sup> Seraphina, or 'Serrie,' narrates in the first person, allowing a conversational style to stray into interruptions, digressions, stream-of-

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<sup>1</sup> The Scotiabank Giller Prize is a national award that attracts wide publicity. This is in part due to it being the richest literary prize in Canada. It has also been the subject of critical controversy in 2007, with Stephen Henighan asserting that it demonstrates the elite establishment of 'power in Canadian culture'.

<sup>2</sup> The Winterset Award is a regional award, for the best annual literary writing from Newfoundland.

<sup>3</sup> Since the novel was published, it too has been short-listed for the Giller Prize. Also, in 2005, it won the Commonwealth Writer's Prize at regional level for Canada and the Caribbean and has been long listed for the IMPAC award in 2007.

<sup>4</sup> *Heave* was nominated for the 2003 Thomas Head Raddall Atlantic Fiction Award. Hosted by the Writers' Federation of Nova Scotia, this award recognises Atlantic Canadian literary fiction under the name of a classic, New Canadian Library published, Nova Scotian writer.

consciousness, second person narration and even imagined conversation. Amidst these digressions in narrative are the imagined words of her dead grandmother. This use of nostalgia, alongside the formal and geographical concerns of the novel, strongly connects *Heave* to Ernest Buckler's 1952 novel *The Mountain and The Valley*. Conlin's text is also a contemporary reflection on local identity in the contemporary world, alluding to co-existence of the national and global. This chapter addresses the construction of 'authentic' contemporary identity and the regional home-place in both *Heave* and *Alligator*. In constructing 'authenticity,' both Moore and Conlin can be seen as similar to Lynn Coady and her wish to dispel 'At-Can-Lit tropes and traditions,' but in doing so, can be seen as vulnerable to re-inscribing some of those very same regional ideas. Conlin and Moore are then in continuous dialogue with the same forces that affect regional identity. The local, national and global affect how both writers construct lived place and both novels show different strategies in response to literary tradition, national 'colonisation' and globalisation.

Both Conlin and Moore express concerns over the voicing of place, or the authenticity of place representation, which I will term place-voice. Implicit in their concern is the fact that places do not have voices; people voice place and therefore it is important to see the representation of place as always constructed and frequently contested. It is then necessary to say there can never be an authentic place-voice, simply many attempts at constructing an apparently authentic place-voice. What then is 'inauthentic' place-voice? Both Conlin and Moore tie inauthenticity to notions of appropriated voice or the exoticism of the 'local colour' text.<sup>5</sup> Moore's judgement of Annie Proulx's *The Shipping News* sees it as the former, having in her opinion "mined

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<sup>5</sup> What Ward and Trent et al. classically once defined as "strongly picaresque characters and scenes hitherto unknown to the reader [...] a detail of stage setting wholly subsidiary to the vital elements of the tale" Ward & Trent, et al. *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1907–21 (New York: Bartleby.com, 2000) <<http://www.bartleby.com/cambridge/>>. [07 April 2007].

the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* and stuffed the novel with Newfoundlandisms that somehow don't come off sounding quite right.”<sup>6</sup> The social and political reflection of the region in a Pulitzer-Prize winning novel is of concern because it can be seen to re-enact the perceived exploitation by outsiders that Atlantic Canada has become so accustomed to. Here also, faithfulness to accent and idiom does not appear to have created an ‘authentic’ portrait of place. Conlin also seems to fear the notion of the local colour text, seeing it as inauthentic and appropriative. In reviewing *Scotch River* by non-Maritime author Linda Little, Conlin begins by stating that she fears outsiders creating “faux Maritime storytelling featuring a tartan-attired cast of tourism-brochure characters.”<sup>7</sup> Here is the threat of the exoticised caricature, the appropriated and the exploited, themes which are mirrored in national political and socioeconomic attitudes to the Atlantic region. However, Conlin admits that Little challenges her general assumptions towards non-Maritime writers by producing a convincing Nova Scotian narrative. Therefore, a widely acceptable place-voice can still be constructed in fiction, no matter where you come from. Perhaps the key to this is in what Moore says further to her comments on *The Shipping News*, that “we expect literary fiction to be universal and particular at the same time, and accurate in its particularities.”<sup>8</sup> Those particularities and details are actually the manner in which ‘authenticity’ becomes constructed.

Lawrence Mathews sees Lisa Moore's writing as divorced from the past literary tradition of Newfoundland, asserting that her writing conducts itself “as though the issues of collective identity [...] have now been settled or become

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<sup>6</sup> Lisa Moore, 'The Ends of the Earth' in *The Walrus* (July 2006) [12 January 2007] <<http://www.walrusmagazine.com/articles/literature-the-ends-of-the-earth/4/>>

<sup>7</sup> Christy Ann Conlin, 'Down East on the range' Review of *Scotch River* by Linda Little. *The Globe and Mail* April 29, 2006 Saturday

<sup>8</sup> Moore, 'The Ends of the Earth' <<http://www.walrusmagazine.com/articles/literature-the-ends-of-the-earth/4/>>

irrelevant.”<sup>9</sup> This observation gives some sense of Moore’s fictional St. John’s, where her work has also been called “site-specific without being regionally straitjacketed.”<sup>10</sup> St. John’s in Moore’s fiction is constructed subtly, and drip-fed through each individual character’s perspectives and interactions with the lived place. However, where the old regionalist writer was implicitly derided as being too particular, “the mediocre writer who articulates her or his ‘place of belonging’ as souvenir album rather than microcosm,”<sup>11</sup> or to some the writer of the local colour, the new Atlantic Canadian writer stands as much chance of being ‘too universal.’ There is a school of thought that sees subtlety as a failure to be specific enough, and a strategy which admits the spectre of ‘placelessness.’<sup>12</sup> Often the term ‘placelessness’ refers to the process through which some, always imagined, ‘authentic’ identity is closer to erasure because of a misrepresentation, a change in ownership or a lack of distinctive qualities.<sup>13</sup> Danielle Fuller’s comment on Moore’s earlier short stories, describing her earlier settings as “broadly delineated backdrops that can stand for almost any city,”<sup>14</sup> hints at the kinds of readings that subtlety can bring.<sup>15</sup> Moore’s settings, even in her early works, are specific to St. John’s. However, her expression of St. John’s is primarily through accumulated in-character observations and place-specific references, and does not bring the self-awareness of the classic, sole-narrator

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<sup>9</sup> Lawrence Mathews, ‘The Country of No Country’ *Essays on Canadian Writing*, 82 (2004) p.12

<sup>10</sup> Kjeld Haraldsen. ‘Skittish Dance of Relationships – Its Tangled Ambivalence’ Review of *Open* by Lisa Moore. *Books in Canada* October 2002 p.7

<sup>11</sup> Keefer, op. cit., p.29

<sup>12</sup> A fear many would find hard to define, placelessness is not as literal as it sounds. It would be misleading to think that place could ever disappear, for place will always be tangible even if its identity markedly changes.

<sup>13</sup> It is a fear hard to dispel, because the reinstatement of a supposed ‘authentic’ identity will always draw into sharp contrast the fact that authenticity is always constructed.

<sup>14</sup> Danielle Fuller. *Writing the Everyday: Women’s Textual Communities in Atlantic Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004) p.100

<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that Fuller’s study was published in 2004, by which point Lisa Moore was a widely published short story writer, with two collections *Degrees of Nakedness* (1995) and *Open* (2002). Thus, Fuller’s comments do not directly apply to *Alligator*. Lisa Moore’s first novel, *Alligator* was published in Canada in 2005. Nonetheless, all of Lisa Moore’s published writing so far has dealt with fiction set against Newfoundland.



describing a setting.<sup>16</sup> T F Riegelhof's review of *Alligator* in *The Globe and Mail*, entitled 'Sex and the Newfoundland City,'<sup>17</sup> carries similar implications, expressing a concern for the implacability of Moore's style alongside other contemporary Canadian writers. The reason for drawing attention to this critical trend, despite its equally subtle tenor, is so that Moore is not subsumed into what Noah Richler terms the Canadian pantheon of "the abstract landscape of a whole generation of 'urban' writers who have not yet found ways to express their cities' differences."<sup>18</sup> Moore's *Alligator* expresses St. John's through a variety of interesting strategies, the foremost of which is the mixture of perspectives created by multiple character angles. This avoidance of a sole narrator to stand for place is a sophisticated development in the tradition of Atlantic Canadian writing.

Christy Ann Conlin is seen by Herb Wyile to be one of a group of "East Coast writers [who] explores those complexities [of the home place] with a dark and combative humour."<sup>19</sup> Also including Lisa Moore, Wyile's term for the group – 'combative' – could be seen as more applicable to Conlin, who has an overarching stance of combat to an older Atlantic Canadian literary tradition. Noah Richler further vocalises this tendency of Conlin's, seeing her as making a "comic point of rebutting the stories of migration and sad return that [seem] to be a staple of Maritime literature."<sup>20</sup> *Heave* is certainly a self-aware novel, at once consciously writing the

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<sup>16</sup> This is seen quite prominently in the Atlantic Canadian texts which the New Canadian Library publishes.

<sup>17</sup> T. F. Riegelhof. "Sex and the Newfoundland City" Review of *Alligator* by Lisa Moore. *The Globe and Mail* September 24, 2005

<sup>18</sup> Noah Richler. *This is My Country, What's Yours? A Literary Atlas of Canada* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2006) p.15. If these authors do exist, and here Richler gives the examples of Gowdy and Henderson, then they are also what Stephen Henighan is concerned with, in his stated trend of North American Fair Trade Agreement (NAFTA) fiction. (See Introduction: "Critical Terrain")

<sup>19</sup> Herb Wyile. 'As for Me and Me Arse' *Canadian Literature* 189 2006. p.100

<sup>20</sup> Noah Richler. Op. cit. p.199 Here Richler also exemplifies the kind of slippage that occurs in contemporary criticism between the terms Maritime and Atlantic Canada. If this term has been meant as Maritime, it is wither out of context with his surrounding arguments about Newfoundland, or he is referring to a past Maritime tradition which has since become a part of the wider Atlantic literary tradition. The second context is how discursive Maritime tradition is seen within this thesis, given that

Annapolis Valley and rewriting the imagined geography of Ernest Buckler's Annapolis Valley. In doing this, *Heave* establishes a sense of palimpsest. Conlin's novel even mirrors the structure of Buckler's novel, framing the central story, which recalls the personal history of the protagonist, with a prologue and an epilogue set in the present. The similarities do not end there. *Heave* also borrows the thematic concern of the pastoral from *The Mountain and the Valley*. Employing the pastoral's inclination for stability and transcending the closed world of human interaction, Conlin recreates the local place as traditional and rooted. Serrie's depiction of a car journey shows this, as she says, "we are barrelling down the Highway 101 into the Valley and, as cold and wintery as it is, there is nothing more beautiful than that view. The Minas Basin spread out at low tide, the lowering sun varnishing the red mud."<sup>21</sup> Attention to cars and roads, and in other instances factories, ensures the pastoral invoking of tradition does not invade the novel's temporal scheme. Where Conlin's diversion from Buckler is perhaps most important is the inclusion of a character who is Acadian. Serrie's friend, Dearie Melanson, gives voice to a people often conspicuously absent in the fiction of Anglo-Atlantic literature.<sup>22</sup> Dearie represents a culture whose own material presence is being erased and assimilated, even within her own family, "her father says it's just history and he has better things to think about than a bunch of dead French people." [H 89] Unfortunately, Dearie's attempts to reconstruct her past from material evidence are overshadowed by the glib comedy of such summaries. The meticulous details of "Acadian points of interest [such as]

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contemporary writing communities necessitate the employment of Atlantic as a critical term despite the references to sometimes separate histories.

<sup>21</sup> Christy Ann Conlin *Heave* (Anchor Canada, 2002) p.172 Hereafter referred to in the text as [H].

<sup>22</sup> This absence could be a sign of intolerance in contemporary regional narratives for cross regional groups, given that the Acadian people, according to Bleakney, "consider themselves a nation" and yet are no longer geographically sited. However, it is equally plausible that some writers would view writing on Acadian culture to be akin to cultural appropriation. J. Sherman Bleakney. *Sods, Soil, and Spades : The Acadians at Grand Pré and Their Dykeland Legacy* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004) p.4

Grand Pré [...] the deportation site, back in 1755, when Colonel John Winslow put them on boats, burned their villages to ashes, and sent them all over the world,” [H 90] fail to resonate as each of Serrie’s peers is shown to have a past that they are attempting to address. Instead, the comedy of Dearie’s inability to speak French and her struggle to learn an Acadian national anthem in Latin preside. Again, this strategy of rebutting straightforward identity seems mired in the reiteration of the very views that are meant to be dispelled.

*Alligator*’s movement backwards and forwards between characters looks not to the characters themselves to inscribe and check common thought. These characters are diverse, and no one voice is privileged: Mr Duffy the developer, Frank the hot dog salesman, his best friend Kevin, Madeleine the filmmaker, her sister Beverley (mother to Colleen), Carol the ex-avon lady, Isobel the actress, Valentin the Russian ‘thug’, and Loyola the alligator keeper living in Louisiana. These narrations intersect amidst the everyday life of the city, naming other characters that don’t explicitly receive discreet narratives of their own, such as the homeless man in the mall, Mr John Harvey. All engage in the basic observations of a consumer society – buying, eating and exchanging thoughts on generic items – whilst analysing intensely their emotional relationships with those around them. These characters are mainly created in the third person by an omniscient narrator; however, late in the novel, Colleen narrates a few first person segments whilst travelling to Louisiana. The effect of segmented character narratives is that of multiple voices chronicling their lives in the city. The join of third person composer and the character is seamless, as minute movements are attended to with the detachment of a screenplay writer, “Colleen looks at the judge’s reflection in the brass panels of the elevator. His eyebrows hang down into his watery eyes.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Lisa Moore. *Alligator*. (London: Virago Press, 2006) p.22 Hereafter referred to in the text as [A]

What seems a natural action is an imperative, discreetly orchestrating the individual actions, diving in and out of thoughts, emotions and memories. Some could see this as forced, and as contrived as the sole narrator figure of *Heave*: however, Moore's attempt to create multiple perspectives agrees with Danielle Fuller's methodological assertion that "conflicts and differences...will never be recognised if individual experience is adopted as a model for comprehending group processes."<sup>24</sup> Each of the characters in *Alligator* has a differing mental perspective on life, with Moore attempting to portray urban life in St. John's as a group of disparate and argumentative standpoints. These voices of *Alligator*, functioning as a collective representation of a group from the cultural margin, go some way to unveiling the regional truths or, as Fuller terms them, "'Situated' knowledges", or "previously unarticulated stories or knowledges."<sup>25</sup> Fuller uses such terms in order to investigate the contribution oppressed or culturally-omitted voices can make. In Moore's case, despite her cacophony of characters being a personally created community, the diversity of viewpoint is of particular interest in retaining the regional as a group of heterogeneous individuals.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the inclusion of difference represents an emergent mode of regional representation. This deconstructs common-sense views and avoids the charge that Moore as Atlantic writer, and as a previously unacknowledged voice, is inherently valuable.

Moore and Conlin both use a conventional sense of faithfulness to place-realism, alongside their own individual techniques. The logical application of this place-realism to a contemporary place comes to be sophisticated, as it deals with

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<sup>24</sup> Fuller, op. cit., p.22

<sup>25</sup> Fuller, ibid p.8

<sup>26</sup> Within Fuller's study there is a suggestion that Atlantic Canadian textual communities can create a more valid, authentic local knowledge. Moore, as part of the Burning Rock writing collective, could conceivably be influenced by real life members in creating multiple voices. This would perhaps gesture towards an enhanced authenticity of local voice; however, such an assertion would need a more intense critical investigation into the practices of the group as a whole. Further inferences of group influence on fictive characters can be seen in the work of Michael Winter (see Chapter 4).

aspects of place which could be seen as invasive to natural character. The roads of both narratives are particular and accurate, constructing a hyper-realistic topography. In *Heave*, Serrie refers to specific highways and then follows by referring to local places, for instance “Reggie’s from Antigonish, where they all act like they just got off the boat.” [H 173] Similarly, *Alligator* frequently mentions street names: “She’d gone through the red light on Topsail Road by Brookfield Road.” [A 45] These observations reflect John Mullan’s claims about this kind of detail in literature, whereby “if the location is particularised, the psychology takes root.”<sup>27</sup> References to place are therefore not inert; instead, they draw out complex associations to specific places. This specificity of place even applies when Moore and Conlin engage with the indistinct arena of the so-called ‘non-place.’<sup>28</sup> A key version of this space portrayed in both *Alligator* and *Heave* is that of the shopping mall. Again, both malls described have real-life equivalents. *Alligator*’s ‘Atlantic Place Mall’ serves as a space in which the truly impoverished and disenfranchised seem to congregate. In the food court, Colleen and her mother Beverly encounter the homeless man Mr John Harvey, and Colleen recalls having seen him “in a sleet storm [...] sat on a bench across from City hall.” [A 84] This experience and recognition transforms the supposed non-space into a place vested with recognition and identity in a larger locational narrative. In *Heave*, the commodities found at the ‘County fair mall’ contribute to divesting the space of its homogenous identity. Here, Serrie buys her brother Percy “a book about the history of the Dominion Atlantic Railway.” [H 184] Supposed non-places will always have distinct content, even if this is only provided by the context of location.

There is also a larger national cultural background to commercial scenes in both novels when specific Canadian stores and brands are referenced. Again, this

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<sup>27</sup> John Mullan, *How Novels Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) p.196

<sup>28</sup> For more on this idea see Marc Augé *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* Trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 1995)

shows a willingness to evoke the specific place by narrating in particular detail, and this detail will not only engage with, but have meaning vested in it, by the characters' psychologies. These brands need not be read as symbolic, despite the way they may appear as unfamiliar to the wider reading audience. Instead, these references enhance a belief that the characters are negotiating within a Canadian space. Douglas Coupland terms the kind of brands used, like Jam Jams, Carnation Milk, Tim Hortons, Dominion or Canadian Tire, as "icons and forms which draw on our nation's shared memories,"<sup>29</sup> expanding their presence in Canadian culture to enact "selling ourselves to ourselves."<sup>30</sup> Implicit in Coupland's statement is the way that value assigned to brand names attains a cultural currency in national identity. Without this presence of national culture within the regional, the regional would appear so disconnected as to be a contrived caricature. There is a certain recognition of commercial Canadian experience within *Alligator* which reflects the real policies of Canadian cultural protectionism employed by the federal government in order to sustain Canadian companies and Canadian brands. Even if these details are read as particular instead as symbolic, they still have a vital function.

Equally, an acknowledgement of forms of supposed global homogeneity is crucial to an accurate portrait of the local realm. This seems quite in keeping with Roland Richardson's theory of 'glocalisation', that it "makes no good sense to define the global as if the global excludes the local."<sup>31</sup> The attempt at constructing an authentic place-voice must acknowledge characters' access to global influences, even if the characters themselves choose to eschew these. *Heave* notes the access to TV and the commodity reification of BMW cars, and the gradual development of tourism

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<sup>29</sup> Coupland, Douglas *Souvenir of Canada* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2002) p.3

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Roland Robertson. 'Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity' in Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash and Roland Robertson (eds.) *Global Modernities* (London: Sage, 1995) p.34

in the Annapolis Valley area by the German investor, Hans. Meanwhile *Alligator*, whilst engaging with tourism, primarily addresses contemporary global society by its frequent reference to the internet. Early in the novel, Colleen tells us a flashback is set “before the twin towers and web sites that show a mounted rifle aimed at a corral of exotic animals [...] you press *Enter* and an emu goes down.” [A 4] *Heave*’s temporal stance is more uncertain, seemingly vested with the past in a physical sense. Initially, this could be seen as an aversion to the kinds of global technology and capitalism that the German investors bring to the area, and as a confirmation of antimodern sentiment in the Annapolis Valley. However, a short history of the place, told by Serrie’s brother Percy, shows a very tangible reason for this fear:

Lupin Cove was a port-of-entry, had a shipbuilding industry, lumber mill on the stream, and a thriving agricultural community until the trains came and the Valley developed. At first the train tracks were laid right over the mountain and out onto the wharf but they stopped coming eventually [...] The village is in a state of decay, Percy says. [H 218]

The past trust in innovative technology like the railway has proven to be coincidental to the end of local industry, ensuring that the material conditions are hostile to global consumerism. Conlin’s Annapolis Valley is a place of poverty, and so not simply a place hostile to the outside, or a place in the past, but a place where the ‘outside’ seldom appears.

The elements of the past which are still manifest in present objects, seem a key part of each novel’s approach. Conlin’s *Heave* consciously creates an investigation of the past. Serrie’s imagined speech from her ‘Grammie’ binds the notion of a past knowledge haunting the present. However, provocatively, this voice advises on change, “*You are who you are and that’s it, and until you accept that, well, you’ll*

*always be sitting in an outhouse wishing things would never change. Change is life."*

[H 11] This opening focus on change underlines the sense of a necessary palimpsest, whereby the past must be recalled to be written over. Not only does this statement trigger Seraphina's flashback, it emphasises the function of the past in the personal future. Serrie's acceptance of the past necessitates a kind of change absent from the nostalgic, elegiac framing of Buckler's novel. However, as with Buckler's novel, the personal past is hard to trace amidst a collective past. Serrie's history is also her family's history. Serrie's mother's decision to sell off family heirlooms to pay bills, and to send her brother Percy to college, leaves a sharp collective guilt. The list of items is punctuated by concern, "the antique mah-jong set with real ivory pieces, the Italian end-of-day glass vase, the art deco perfume bottle, they were all gone now, just small pieces, no one would notice them missing, Martha had said, chewing her nails."

[H 310] This recollection is the final and most difficult part of Serrie's journey to her past. The guilt of selling antiques to Mr. Burgess is created because Serrie's grandmother has labelled him a vulture, and so she recalls the moment of decision on the sale, with "ghosts hovering about us as I wrapped up the Limoges teapot." [H 152] However, this is infused with another more personal haunting, the ghost of Mr. Burgess's sexual abuse of Serrie, under the guise of providing much needed money to her family. Serrie's multiple guilt is associated with selling the collective past and selling herself. An earlier comment on Mr Burgess strikes a remarkable message when read in the context of both guilt and the need to accept the past, as "Mr Burgess was afraid of getting old [...] because there would come a point where time itself would force you to look back and be accountable." [H 148] By drawing together the need to be accountable for personal and collective pasts, *Heave* cleverly merges the need to address authentic identity and the threat of commodification. Abuse,



possession and appropriation all become loaded terms in the light of Serrie's personal narrative, and the tensions of establishing a social identity in the wake of such trauma sit uncomfortably with conventional ideas of tradition.

Moore's *Alligator* also uses the idea of tradition to establish a contemporary setting as a continuation of the past. Madeleine, a film director, and one of the main characters in a cast of eleven, voices traditional practices as part of her project to represent Newfoundland on film: "she wanted Newfoundland before Confederation because what kind of people were they? She remembers her mother's housekeeper tearing the skin off rabbits in the kitchen sink." [A 199] However, these practices are not as important as their commodity value, or their artistic translation, as historical accuracy is largely ignored: "they did this on the Southern Shore back in the 1830's...it didn't matter if they really did it; they couldn't have really done it, but what a film." [A 39] The actions of the narrative are simply alluded to and dismissed as the landscape becomes the centre of Madeleine's artistic direction. Madeleine represents the view that the past is an easier, more permissible device with which to make something of the landscape, "like Guy – what he had made of the Southern Shore in winter – it was a Gothic, vicious landscape, a curse, a new kind of beauty." [A 123] Such views are often levelled at historical narratives in a wider sense. Meanwhile, Frank, a young man who has lost his mother to cancer, meditates on her leftover possessions which hold no commercial or sentimental value to him. They instead are the residue of the past manifest in the present, depicted as an inventory, "a vinyl recording of the Pope's address to the people of Newfoundland when he visited in 1984 [...] a set of rosary beads carved from narwhal tusk, and a hooked mat his mother had done herself." [A 15] Frank also confronts tradition, the vested memory contained in the mundane present, and finds that he cannot discern a monetary value

for it – this is the one thing that contemporary consumerism insists objects have. When the past is not part of a commodity, Frank doesn't wish to be associated with it. However, this is not a symbolic rejection of collective identity but a practical repercussion of Frank's economic situation. Frank is attempting to be self solvent, and is living in a cramped bed-sit; therefore, his world is governed by money and redeemable value. Both Madeleine and Frank's situations here are perfect examples of how the collective past manifests itself to the characters in *Alligator*, being a part of personal lived experience. In this sense communal identity is seldom consciously considered by the characters and instead filters in through the quotidian.

Another distinct aspect of each novel has to be the use of idiom and local dialect. In *Alligator*, the employment of accent for the police characters undermines a fixed sense of peripheral authority figures. Frank calls the police after his Inuit neighbour has not been seen in a while. When the police arrive, they “borrow a butter knife and [...use] it to jimmy the door,” [A 16] suggesting that they are seldom called upon to enter locked rooms. Furthermore, the practice of ‘jimmying’ conveys a sense of amateurism which jars with the formal identity of the police. After this, Frank overhears one officer say, “He’s after hanging himself in here, Greg.” [A 16] This performance of local idiom prompted personal recourse to the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* for explanation. The idiom ‘to be after (doing something)’ means to have already completed an action.<sup>32</sup> Here then, the police evade being identified as a homogenous outside force, and instead are a locally engaged body formed from markedly local people. However, in seeing this ‘localising’ of the conventionally uniform, there is an aspect of slapstick that seems closer to the local colour story which Moore is attempting to avoid. Other moments of regional phrasing

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<sup>32</sup> G.M Story., W.J. Kirwin and J. D. A. Widdowson (eds.) *Dictionary of Newfoundland English Online* Memorial University's Heritage Web Site  
<<http://www.heritage.nf.ca/dictionary/azindex/pages/25.html>>

are more subtle, and less dependent on radically differing meanings, instead focusing on unusual speech patterns. Colleen's mother, Beverly, has moments of thinking in regional phrasing, observing "the wine was surprisingly right for homemade wine." [A 49] Such sparing use of regionally dependent language would seem to indicate a desire to avoid becoming a work more about colloquial language than the observations and characterisations that negotiate a subtle representation of regional identity. Moore is ultimately aware of the Newfoundland stereotype bound up in language, that "they speak in a dialect that can rival Navajo for indecipherability – that is, when they really ham it up."<sup>33</sup> Hamming it up in the dialogue is the last thing Moore is aiming for, instead leaving much tonal impression of delivery to be inferred or implied. Indeed, speech itself goes unpunctuated, with the absence of speech marks in *Alligator* providing a slippage in the acts of thought and speech represented. In some places dialogue becomes indistinguishable from interior monologue. This style lends *Alligator* a universality of interpretive reliance, leaving the reader to deduce what is spoken and how. When a paragraph is full of sentences sporadically qualified at the end by 'he thought,' 'she said' or 'she read,' it leaves the impression of many sources of information crystallising in the one mind. This unusual, stylised form can be seen to support the position of the local character as a translator of disparate voices, with disparate origins.

Where *Alligator* is spare with idiom, *Heave* is loaded. Serrie's narrative suggests that a place name's use reflects on the user's relation to place: "it's always *the* Mountain, always with a definite article. The only people who say North Mountain or South Mountain are people who come from away or those journalists who wrote about the incest scandal over in Long Road. They kept saying 'on South

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<sup>33</sup> Coupland. Op.cit. p.74

Mountain’.” [H 51]<sup>34</sup> This same conflict, of differing names for the same thing, appears through the poetic local and administrative national name for “Lupin Cove Road (what the government calls Route 445).” [H 6] The place literally has two different levels, an inside and a national outsider positioning, embedded within language. Language also takes centre stage when objects are cursed at. Serrie’s words for the rehabilitation centre deteriorate into comical local idiom for an outdoor toilet, “nuthouse, hospital, shit-house, outhouse...”[H 194] Serrie’s terms for inanimate objects are often predicated by regional swearing, shown by her thoughts on her wedding dress and its “goddamn jeesly antique lace train.” [H 4] Such small linguistic deviations may appear inconsequential but the gradual recurrence of such terms further serves to create a distinctive regional quality.

Given that both *Heave* and *Alligator* are, to some extent, post-modern and knowing perspectives, they each voice fears that identity might be defined by image within the comments of a character. In *Alligator*, Frank observes that “the city had done up George Street to look like drinking was a Newfoundland tradition. But the old-fashioned street lights were brand new.” [A 139] Interestingly, here Frank sees ‘the city’ as responsible for constructing its own history, and in doing so lays the blame for such practices away from the select few who could have conducted such work. For Frank, the elite are then nameless and faceless, as his struggles for money remove how engaged he can be as an engaged political citizen. *Heave* contains a passage where an outsider, Joachim, a German working at a new hotel that has just opened near Serrie, gets drunk and objects to the picturesque fishing industry being unlike the romantic image: “the next complaint is how the fish they use for bait smells

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<sup>34</sup> Conlin has commented that “At various stages [of the copy-editing process] they tried to edit this out which would have neutralized the vernacular and stripped the characters of their authenticity. I think nouns are alive for the characters thus the use of the article. Again, it is about relationship with place.” Here then place takes on a very distinctive relationship to language and expression. Taken from personal correspondence with Christy Ann Conlin. For full transcript see Appendix B.

like fish.” [H 302] Conlin adds to the humour of this enactment, allowing the entire readership to become insiders, as we share the joke with the narrator. This clever posture allows us as readers to believe that outsiders buy tourist imagery as truth. Also, this allows all potential outsiders to be insiders, believing that we have, in the process of reading *Heave*, borne witness to authentic knowledge. Conlin uses the Germans to great effect, also employing their distanced standpoint to vocalise things supposedly meant to be unsaid, with Hans attempting to break down the problems of the locals to:

the people, they are hard to get to know, all this mistrust of outsiders, people from away, my God, even people from Ontario, you know, you think they are from away, calling them Upper Canadians. You still hate us for the war and them for the country’s confederation. Always thinking outsiders are going to do something very bad. Like this house, you know. Some people won’t sell to Germans. [H 272]

Here, the comments have an effect of suggesting both truth and untruth; they are the truth in a sense that his comments are meant to verbalise the unsaid and so are bravely plundering the implicit, but also untruth, because we are continually aware of Hans and the Germans as outsiders to this community. This is clever, as it distances the authority of suggestion from Conlin, and leaves many potential readings. It also indicates that collective identity is often formed from both the inside and the outside, agreeing with Kwame Anthony Appiah, who suggests that “many people may have the idea that the normative content of an identity should be determined essentially by

its bearers [...However] recognition by people of other identities is often a proper source of their meaning.”<sup>35</sup>

The function of the outsider in *Alligator* is served by Valentin, a Russian ‘thug’ and his beaten local actress-girlfriend Isobel. Valentin offers an alternative perspective, continually dwelling on how “he hated the place as he had never hated any place in his life.” [A 77] At once sociopath and human embodiment of the characteristics of the alligator, Valentin allows a perspective of alienation to unveil ludicrous local practices. Having been on a Russian ship seized by the government, the local community Catholic Church put on a fundraising bingo game to feed the crew. However, a subsequent meeting of the town council reveals that locals have seen rats aboard ship. The meeting’s notes are sent to the vessel, where Valentin, upon hearing of the rats for the first time, “became terrified and knew he had to get off this ship.” [A 109] Further to this, the notes contain a measured comment that “money from the bingo games had been previously allotted to the town library for the purchase of computers,” [A 109] and so form a further indication that local charity is not always what it seems. Local attitudes to the Russian are later further clarified as a man leaves Valentin at the electric fence of the local dump, declaring “it’s not skin off my arse if you crowd decide to electrocute yourselves.” [A 111] Not only is Valentin unceremoniously treated, he is also treated as if he is inextricable from a projected collective identity, setting up a polarising of social affinity. Valentin then becomes a node of spatial conflict, having internalised his affiliation to Russian identity and is unable to understand or adapt to the environment of Newfoundland: “He had come to a cold and ugly island that hardly existed, could not be found on many maps. He was nowhere.” [A 80]

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<sup>35</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah *The Ethics of Identity* p.67

A wider form of spatial conflict is generated by Moore's continual participation in notions of the urban area and of regional reference, given that as Laurie Ricou suggests "conventionally, 'regional' seldom describes urban writing."<sup>36</sup> The independent meaning of physical spatial labels, which may evoke specificity when employed on rural terrain, such as 'muskeg' or 'barren rocky outcrop,' are not available in Moore's urban regional engagement with St. John's. Instead, Moore's sense of place is bound up with the specific and the abstract of St. John's as an urban centre. The terms available in the realist narrative to create a sense of a marginal regional urban centre are limited, precisely because the urban is seen as an anonymous space. Dialect and place names are expected but cannot alone constitute a fictional translation of a place, for these, without investment of character dialogue or action, are created only in the minds of those familiar already with the setting. Equally, employing Ricou's understanding of traditional regionalism, Conlin's *Heave* can be seen as a more traditional regional novel. However, Conlin's transnationalism provides a problem to those older boundaries, drawing Serrie's flight to London into her personal regional narrative. Mixing regional or national identity with a wider geographical frame of reference can be seen traditionally to "run the risk of denying the integrity of Canadian literary culture."<sup>37</sup> In suggesting this, Leon Surette sees transnational analysis as vital to a Canadian studies framework, and thus, something that regional studies must also consider to remain relevant.<sup>38</sup> *Heave* shows that

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<sup>36</sup> Laurie Ricou, 'Region/Regionalism' in William H. New (Ed.) *Encyclopaedia of literature in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002) p.950

<sup>37</sup> Leon Surette, "Here is Us: The Topocentrism of Canadian Literary Criticism" *Canadian Poetry* 10 (Spring/Summer 1982) [12 January 2007] <<http://www.canadianpoetry.ca/cpjm/vol10/surette.htm>>

<sup>38</sup> Surette's comments suggest a recurrent tendency to simplify geographically bounded identity. Recent work by Joanne Saul, *Writing the Roaming Subject: The Biotext in Canadian Literature*, has looked at the roaming figure in Canadian literature, and how authorial identity and textual identity can provide together a challenge to stable identities, however solely in the genre of the bio-text. Despite this focus, the work sets up interesting ideas of resistance that could be used to show how transnational figures as narrative subjects provide resistance to critically solidified concepts such as the binary of 'authentic' local and generic outsider.

transnational narratives suggest more about how subjects construct themselves. When Serrie flies to London to escape Nova Scotia, she ends up referring to her home province ever more frequently. Her experience of the Crown Jewels reminds her of “Grammie’s coffee table books back in her house in Foster,” [H 21] and her description of herself on drugs as “Anne Of Green Gables Does The Big Time” [H 30] is certainly regionally inflected. These spatial conflicts show that the self is the centre of constructing authentic identity, and, in agreement with Herb Wyile, that “region and nation [are] social constructs that have been internalised and are taken as natural.”<sup>39</sup> Serrie’s internalised regional affiliation is powerfully reinforced when it has the possibility to connect to regional memory.

However, in Moore’s *Alligator*, Colleen’s journey to Louisiana shows less signs of this internalisation of regional identity. In meeting Loyola, a man who keeps alligators, she finds herself beholden to her home province, keeping reference to it at the minimal. Introducing herself as Madeleine’s niece, she terms her aunt “A woman from Newfoundland [and] left it at that.” [A 253] Colleen’s spatial awareness is much larger given its engagement with the internet. One of the first scenes of *Alligator* describes Colleen downloading beheadings: “I stop watching before they commit the act...This is in a bedroom painted pink and a pink canopy over the bed in a house in the suburbs of St. John’s, up behind the Village Mall. I have a high-speed connection to help with homework. I go into the kitchen for supper and there’s Mom.” [A 3] Colleen’s description of her home portrays a generic, comfortable domestic order, which is routinely open to transgression by outside voices and images. Limits set by the home are stretched to shelter narratives which are seemingly at odds with local ceremony. However, Colleen’s responses filter the power of the images from ‘away’

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<sup>39</sup> Herb Wyile. ‘Forum: What is Region and Nation?’ ed. Susanne Hagemann *Terranglian Territories: Proceedings of the Seventh. International Conference on the Literature of Region and Nation* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2000) p.651



as she becomes a regional site for the interpretation of many influences. As her thought processes and narration intermix, contemporary internet violence, old camera footage of an alligator biting a man's head and a *Cosmo* magazine all seemingly fight for dominance. Colleen filters these experiences, recognising their equal power, yet escapes relativism by concluding that individual attention inevitably privileges one power's influence: "Everything is strange. Strange boils over into strange. But then something strange happens." [A 6] Colleen becomes the dynamic 'new local,'<sup>40</sup> creating herself as the local narrative from conflicting networks of existing powers.

Madeleine, as film director, serves as a voice of local judgement on the photos of Abu Ghirab disseminated in the press. Initially describing the images in storyboard terms, "a naked man in a hood standing on a platform. He stood with his cuffed hands over his genitals," [A 174] the spare prose gives way to a discussion of the quality of the image in mass production:

The photograph was low resolution, and looked like it had passed through a variety of media and the image had been downgraded in the process. The hues in the print were off, an almost imperceptible wrongness of hue and focus, sinister in its casual ineptitude [...] she tries to understand this image. A blooming horror made her skin prickle; what was this photograph? It was a homemade joke about torture, folksy and kitsch, full of abject glee and hatred.

[A 174]

Interestingly, her conclusions are both technical and spatial. As someone concerned with image production, she sees the lack of thought and skill in capturing the moment

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<sup>40</sup> The term 'new local' is coined by Livianna Tossutti in the article 'Regionalism in an age of globalization,' in Keith Archer and Lisa Young (eds) *Regionalism and Party Politics in Canada*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2001. pp. 222-241 Tossutti defines the term as an attention to the regional as part of the global, decentralised economic production, environmentalism and small city living.

as sinister, given the planning and wish to conduct such an act. Then, the lack of skill connects the photo to the homemade, exposing mass media as a forum which thrives on the caricature of such extreme images, revealing the problems in local reading. These images spread across the world's media performing messages of torture and violation, and must have to negotiate many local levels. The term 'homemade' questions the very origins of the images, commenting on the production of meaning at the level of reading, and including them within the space of home. In reprinting these images, the meanings associated with the Iraq conflict become attached to the local narrative of St. John's.

Colleen converts the global drives for environmental protection into a local act, through her own brand of eco-terrorism. Through using the internet, she discovers "material about international groups and people who had handcuffed themselves around the trunks of trees and people who had gone without food or set themselves on fire." [A 66] She uses this material as a means of justification for her own individual local act, pouring sugar down the tanks of bulldozers at a local clear-cut to help save the Newfoundland pine marten. This international narrative of environmental preservation cloaks her localised, sexualised desire for rebellion, "the noise of the pouring sugar, a loud erotic gushing, caused the hairs to stand up on her arms." [A 67] Later in the narrative, Colleen's conflation of rebellion and sexual desire becomes more apparent, as she takes part in a wet t-shirt competition to win money to fly to Louisiana. When she is saved from a fight in the wake of the contest by Frank, she sleeps with him and then steals his money. Madeleine, Colleen's aunt, seems to view this rebellion as justified, but by interesting motives: "the girl had rebelled – of course she had. Look at the world – there was a blast of flame on the front page of the paper, flame in every news box along Water Street. Was it Iraq or Sudan? Why wouldn't the

girl rebel. Who could walk past these boxes and do nothing?" [A 307] To Madeleine, Colleen's rebellion represents how the local is necessarily a site of action within the global. However, this situates all local reactions as responses to only the global, as Madeleine takes Colleen's actions to be a rebellion in line with a post 9/11 world order. In reality, Colleen's actions are personal and local, as she dispenses with global political influences on her life. Local actions here are not inherently global, and are as much about the personal as the communal. Colleen's rebellion can be seen as part of her coming of age, as much as her own discovery of herself as shifting local narrative.

The demands of representing and relating to a local identity within the era of globalisation are reflected in the tensions of Isobel's discussions of acting and performance: "they had to be who they were and who they weren't at the same time." [A 304] Isobel, in having a relationship with Russian sociopath Valentin, addresses her situation and her identity: "she talked, as if to herself about how things were in St. John's and perhaps every town or city in the western world. She talked about an inside and an outside and she said she was on the outside." [A 191] St. John's to Isobel is something she sees from outside, despite being from there, experiencing confusion in tapping into any latent specificity. Perhaps this outsider stance is generated by her having lived in Toronto and returned to St. John's, which she deems to be an admission of failure in Toronto. Despite her own ambivalence to her local setting, she is perceived by many to be affiliated to the local, something illustrated by the job offer she receives via e-mail: "There was talk of a Hollywood actor, someone halfway big, and they wanted [her for] local colour." [A 302] Moore undercuts the straightforward assumptions of placing people that abound in the industry of film. Moore shows here that 'local colour' as regional interest is still a going concern, but rejects a notion that regional coherence can be seen as a shared identity. Regional

coherence stems from an understanding that St. John's is both a node in a network and a network in itself, and that any claim to use Newfoundlander and Atlantic Canadian to pin down an individual's identity is just as loaded with intent as the term 'local colour'. Moore's *Alligator* can be seen as a narrative of Atlantic Canadian life because it is at once closely bounded and diverse, redefining the margin.

Conlin's *Heave* is less likely to position the local figure as a distinct node of addressing national, local and global concerns. The core figures who do attempt this are Serrie, her brother Percy and her father Cyril. Serrie's struggles with national identity are fairly limited; however, on trying on a patriotic nylon bathing suit she does comment "Why can't I be from a country with more taste, more elegance, I thought." [H 180] Further discussion over Christmas dinner broaches questions of affiliation to being "Jewish, Micmac, and Gypsy, in addition to being German, Scottish and Irish;" [H 202] however, such debates are covered by Grammie asserting "we're Nova Scotian and leave it at that." [H 203] Serrie's own personal struggle is more about contemporary existence outside such boundaries of labels. Meanwhile, Percy is attempting to engage fully with the history of Dominion Atlantic Railway but ends up following the route of outmigration by studying in Toronto. This leaves only Cyril, whose relentless attempts to get outhouses preserved are eclipsed by his grant for solar panel research, and he thus becomes the most forward thinking of local characters. [H 193] The acceptance of agency in the local position is something that the embittered state of Aunt Gallie and the subsequent death of Acadian Dearie leave unfulfilled. This repetition of failure and particular focus on the family has drawn some to see *Heave* as cliché. Peter Simpson suggests *Heave* is one of a number of books that suggests "family for better or worse and usually both, is the basis of

Atlantic Canadian life.”<sup>41</sup> Such a statement fails to see regional or racial collective identity as predominantly suggested by the formative participation of the family collective. The sense of family in *Heave* is heightened as it serves to complicate the coming-of-age period of Serrie’s life, and the lack of other figures who are illustrating that contemporary local identity is about constructing oneself as mediator.

In *Alligator*, Frank is one of many characters seen aside from a familial environment, but who comes into contact with supposedly stable bounded identities. There are descriptions of the Russians upstairs, one of whom is Valentin, and the nameless ‘Inuit guy’ who used to live upstairs before he hanged himself. The ‘Inuit guy’ becomes reduced to his race and sex, being left without a name. Frank’s search for common ground with both of these identities is set in terms of the community of St. John’s. Frank’s only true meeting with the Inuit guy is when they are shovelling snow from the pavement, and in turn helping a young nurse opposite their building to free her car. Within this moment, Frank remembers no introductions, but instead a shared grinning, when the Inuit guy deduces Frank has a crush on the nurse. [A 19] The local is the meeting point, as everyday tasks bridge fears of anonymity traditionally engendered in city living. Similarly, the universal is the touchstone for their brief moment of friendship, the understanding of attraction. Yet St. John’s is not utopia, and so the network breaks around fears of interceding in people’s lives. Frank admits that he and his neighbour, Carol, “had known the Inuit guy was in trouble but they’d tried to mind their own business.” [A 14] This intuition becomes hard to express, community knowledge and imaginative consciousness being alike in their stringent failure to conform to workable universal terms. As the police arrive, asking “have you got any reason to worry,” [A 14] there is a juxtaposition of intuited

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<sup>41</sup> Peter Simpson ‘An Atlantic Canadian genre?’ Review of *Heave* by Christy Ann Conlin in *The Ottawa Citizen* May 5, 2002

knowledge and that of individual rights to be free from preconceived identity or behaviour. The presence of an official language seeks to fit the shared situation into an understandable set of terms, and fails. When Frank attempts to determine where Valentin's music originates, he runs into similar problems:

“It was not like Newfoundland music [...] they stomped their feet like they meant the music, they really, really meant it [...] the violins got rougher, full of vengeance and craft and the music was sexual and melodic. It was the same as Newfoundland music or it had turned into Newfoundland music or all music is the same, always, and this was just another example of that.” [A 162]

The vantage Frank possesses, from within the island of Newfoundland, enables his assertions to be part of the local. His identification that the music is meant creates the desire in him to read the origin of the meaning within the local, just as Madeleine reacts to the visual. However, Frank is unable to identify an origin, as music proves both hard to read, and representative of art making collective identity fluid.

Presumptions of collective identity are commonplace, and often overlook the role the individual plays in building these very identities. Stephen Henighan suggests that “art makes a city's history, like its distinctive mood, present to the world,”<sup>42</sup> suggesting that a place can have a mood, can have an identity separate from its physical presence, and that somehow the abstract industry of art produces this. Similarly, representative of this viewpoint is Wayne Johnston, who asserts that “the possibility that place affects character – that place *has* character and exerts itself upon us, goes a long way to restoring some mystery and humility to life.”<sup>43</sup> Both of these opinions seem to favour a top down formation of people by the place, asserting

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<sup>42</sup> Henighan, Stephen. ‘Reading the City’ *Geist* 53 (Summer, 2004) [09 January 2007] <<http://www.geist.com/columns/columns.php?id=25>>

<sup>43</sup> Johnston, Wayne in Richler op. cit. p.23

something akin to place-determinism. If a place does affect people, it is a combination of environment and the people who create that very place, leading to a more circular model and enhancing the role that individuals play within their locale. Individuals simultaneously translate and create the local. Obviously, the vagueness of terms employed by Johnston is to some extent poetic, and sociologists would wish to deconstruct the terms 'city' or 'place' to political, social, physical, architectural, or industrial systems. The seemingly arbitrary everyday employment of such vague terms is a reflection of the viewpoint that has held sway within regionalism in an era of globalisation, that first the region was dominant and then the global became the dominant, washing away the regional, or replacing it with a caricatured, saleable commodity. These kinds of trends neglect the individuality of local texts created from local characters and local authors, who translate the wealth of symbols around them at the individual local level. In her death throes, Madeleine closes *Alligator*, suggesting that the city is different to those who could only see it as a symbol or monument. St. John's is divested of its earlier imperfections, whereby the buildings of the 1990s existed with "an arrogant disregard of the skyline they butchered," [A 98] coming to be seen as a human collective that fosters coherent identity. The spanworms that have plagued and been preserved within the environmental concerns of the city return, "The city is covered in fluttering white snow. Moths on their hands, on their arms, on their upturned faces." [A 310] Seen from the vantage point of the dying, the city is almost a biblical assembly of people, united in the poetic metaphor that their bodies are the true topography of the city. It is perhaps fitting that the spanworm/moths enact this final visual role, given the debate over their origins: "They had come on the wind or in someone's suitcase. They had come with a shipment of lumber, in a case of apples. Someone had dreamt them." [A 163] That both bodies and dreams are seen as

the cohering forces for local identity seems a fitting redrafting of the terms in which regional identity can be written.

Conlin and Moore share two central concerns, the preconceptions of authenticity in response to outward ideas of Atlantic Canada and the construction of identity enacted through coming of age. It is logical then that these two preoccupations are congruent. Coming of age triggers questions at an individually situated level. At this stage, both *Alligator*'s Colleen and Frank, or *Heave*'s Serrie, handle questions to do with ethics, engagement, social cohesion and belonging. Neither one reinscribes the tradition of the home place as comforting. Instead today's Atlantic home is shown to be much less stable. However, such a change is merely a tendency towards the real interrogation of myths, without which the brutal storylines of *Alligator* and *Heave* would be left unvoiced. If the stereotyped romanticised home place is accepted, another narrative of abuse or estrangement is erased. Further generalisations between both texts' place-voices cannot be made as a whole, with the disparity of rural and urban settings becoming apparent at an early stage. In fact, the differences created by the rural and urban contexts are much more important than the Provincial differences. Lisa Moore's narrative represents a redefinition of the regional identity, by being overtly located in St. John's and discussing how identities are all created in relation to this place. When reviewed in *The Daily Telegraph*, *Alligator* was described as being "altogether too busy."<sup>44</sup> This misses the point. It is the novel's busyness of objects, pursuits and action that triggers each character's reaction and so, their local translation and production of meaning. Christy Ann Conlin's narrative represents an attempt to redefine the Annapolis Valley in literature, creating a rich personal and social narrative. Both authors address many complex issues; however,

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<sup>44</sup> Boddy, Kasia "The eco-terrorist, the hot-dog man and the Russian gangster" *The Daily Telegraph* Saturday, August 5, 2006



certain similarities indicate a method to 'constructing authenticity'. The writing of the global in the local, the present as natural continuation to the past and the concession that identity is both fluid and open to misinterpretation provides evidence of focused approaches that can be employed to write the contemporary place. Moore rewrites the notion of the regional in a contemporary context, a context of globalisation, without recourse to reperforming previously conceived ideas of regional identity. However, Conlin's stance of rebutting regional stereotypes allows more scope to reinvoke the past as contemporary truth. This tendency can then be seen to encourage the reinscription of preconceived regional identity.

### 3. Re-envisioning Atlantic Canada: How does *Whole New Thing* present regional identity and regional imagery?

*Whole New Thing* is a rarity in Canadian film, a regional narrative production shot on location with a largely regional cast and crew for a public cinema release.<sup>1</sup> This is a production from outside the major cities, and because of the reference to situated location and the establishment of what I will term a ‘continuum of backwoods’, the setting draws much attention. Shot entirely in Halifax and Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia, in the depths of winter, the contemporary narrative avoids distinctive landmarks such as the view of Mahone Bay’s three churches, or indeed any ocean shots. Instead, the controlled portrayal of region is drawn alongside a parallel discourse of the rural as a pastoral idyll. The rural idyll is one of many invoked traditions through which this complex film operates. The relation of the pastoral to the regional within Atlantic Canada is not a new phenomenon, as noted by the Nova Scotian archivist W. Brian Speirs. In his essay entitled ‘Eastern Eye: A Nova Scotia Filmography 1899-1973’, Speirs notes that “Nova Scotia, and the Atlantic region in general, [has] laboured under the seemingly fixed stereotyping of its people and way of life as pastoral, quaint, even backward.”<sup>2</sup> *Whole New Thing*’s linking of regional identity to the rural can be viewed as shorthand to this traditional approach, and certainly places the film within a canon of Atlantic cinema. However, if regional cinema has ‘laboured’ under these pastoral stereotypes, then *Whole New Thing* can be seen as working hard within the same paradigm. This paper will address how the

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<sup>1</sup> *Whole New Thing*. Dir. Amnon Buchbinder. Perfs. Aaron Webber, Daniel MacIvor, Robert Joy. DVD Think Film, 2006. All subsequent dialogue cited is from this film.

<sup>2</sup> W. Brian Speirs ‘Eastern Eye: A Nova Scotia Filmography 1899-1973’ [27 August 2007] <  
<http://www.gov.ns.ca/nsarm/databases/easterneye/history.asp> >

scenic, spatial, narrative and audio aspects of *Whole New Thing* function as they both repeat and reinvest in the conventional shorthand towards regional identity.

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To contextualise how surprising *Whole New Thing* is, and the comments of Speirs, it is pertinent to give a brief overview of regional filmmaking in Atlantic Canada. This cannot be disassociated from the dominant national cinematic mode, the documentary film. Documentary film has come to prominence largely through the National Film Board of Canada (NFB), which is subsidised by the Federal Government. The NFB in turn, has provided Canada with a mixture of documentary, animation and experimental short film alongside conventional ideas of fiction feature film. As an institution, the NFB is largely funded to reinforce Canadian national identity, continually turning to the Canadian people for source material. Malek Khouri observes that the NFB has always paid close attention to Atlantic Canada: “since the 1940s, NFB films continually explored the homes and the workplaces of miners, lumberjacks, fishermen and farmers of the Atlantic provinces.”<sup>3</sup> This statement suggests that, regardless of the type of film being made here, the regional film subject is consistently the working class labourer. This regional focus developed further in the 1970s when regionalization became an official part of the goals of the NFB’s film production. At this time, the NFB opened an office in Halifax, Nova Scotia to encourage a regional sensibility. Zoe Druick sees this policy as “the logical extension of the promotion of local distinctiveness for a national and international audience.”<sup>4</sup> This conception of an audience outside the local area perpetuated a focus on the

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<sup>3</sup> Malek Khouli 'Other-ing the Worker in Canadian 'Gay Cinema': Thom Fitzgerald's *The Hanging Garden*' in Malek Khouri and Darrell Varga (eds.) *Working on Screen: Representations of Working Class in Canadian Cinema* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006) p.141

<sup>4</sup> Zoe Druick 'Representing the Local: Canadian Film Policy and Place.' in G. Sherbert, A. Gérin, and S. Petty (Eds.) *Canadian Cultural Poesis: Cultural Studies in Canada*. (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006) p.93

themes of earlier NFB films. With most films now produced by the NFB still largely being documentaries on local labour workers, regionalization clearly created the region as subordinate to the NFB's national agenda. East Coast fiction films made after this movement largely revisit the same subject matter. Commercial films produced in the region have taken the realist tenets of previous documentary film and "mostly favoured mise-en-scene that sought to capture textures of working-class life in Atlantic Canada."<sup>5</sup> However, this summary is taken from a sparse amount of films which are often all represented by one canonical work, *The Rowdyman* (1972), which was written by and starred Gordon Pinsent. As Tom McSorley notes in his history of Atlantic Cinema, investigating the region's produce reveals "the lack of a firmly rooted feature fiction filmmaking tradition in Atlantic Canada."<sup>6</sup> Largely, the documentaries made by the NFB, particularly the 'Challenge for Change' program, have come to be better known than the fiction films made outside the NFB.

The films that compose a history of Atlantic cinema since 1970 are a microcosm of Canadian cinema's national discussions. Atlantic Canada has most recently been used by industrial American cinema as variously a backdrop or setting, and often masqueraded as 'elsewhere'. Generally this movement has been down to tax relief measures which have enticed international productions to use the East Coast. In turn, local commercial productions have been accused of exaggerating the kinds of patterns garnered from decades of NFB films. In response to these two opposing pressures, Noreen Golfman terms "producing homegrown images [as] especially daunting."<sup>7</sup> Golfman further enunciates the pressures on local imagery by determining Atlantic Canada as trapped by "an insidious association of region with central

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<sup>5</sup> Khouli. op. cit.

<sup>6</sup> Tom McSorley 'The Cinema of Atlantic Canada' [27 August 2007] <<http://www.cfi-icf.ca/atlantic.html>>

<sup>7</sup> Noreen Golfman 'Imagining Region' in William Beard and Jerry White (Eds.) *North of Everything* (University of Alberta Press, Edmonton, 2003) p.46

Canadian notions of rural life, a place of tourist potential ('Pictorial Qualities'), and economic deprivation ('Social problems, and dilemmas')."<sup>8</sup> The consideration of central Canadian point of view or tourist potential in commercial filmmaking points to the pressures of commercial return. Seemingly, the imagined audience conceptions of Atlantic Canada and the geography of the audience become a part of the product as a dictating consumer. For independent films which have been made on a smaller budget, these pressures should have a lessened impact. However, such films have also failed to find a large distribution market and therefore these essential negotiations of local identity are largely unknown at an international level. The industrial model of commercial films for an international audience has remained dominant in recent regional history. *Margaret's Museum* (1995), a moderately successful screen adaptation of Sheldon Currie's novel *The Glace Bay Miner's Museum*, fits existing labour models of Atlantic Canada, focusing on a family whose very existence is tied to the local mine. On top of this regional theme, it employs British leads, Helena Bonham Carter and Clive Russell, to maximise a global consumption. Similarly, when adapted to the screen, the controversial novel *The Shipping News* (2001) casts local actors such as Gordon Pinsent as support roles to American actors such as Kevin Spacey or Julianne Moore. Naturally, such casting means that attempts to present a regional accent or authenticity are highly affected, and are secondary to the presence of 'bankable' leads. Commercial effects on regional film production can then be seen as part of a broader trend of 'deregionalization' which Patsy Aspasia Kotsopoulos defines as a process in which situated action is made less specific "for a geographically dispersed viewership."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Golfman. Op. cit p.47

<sup>9</sup> Patsy Aspasia Kotsopoulos 'L.M. Montgomery on Television: The Romance and the Industry of Adaptation' in G. Sherbert, A. Gérin, and S. Petty (Eds.) *Canadian Cultural Poesis: Essays on Canadian Culture* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006) p.272

Whilst *Whole New Thing* should be seen in this tradition, it is also a work indicative of co-writer and lead actor Daniel MacIvor. MacIvor has recently directed two films set in Atlantic Canada, *Past Perfect* (2002) and *Wilby Wonderful* (2004). Both films avoided working class labourer protagonists in favour of exploring middle class subjects. Key characters in MacIvor's films are typically professors and sales clerks or police officers and real estate professionals.<sup>10</sup> Understanding how these regional representations came to screen should show more clearly how *Whole New Thing* was not only made, but also got distribution. With much owing to the national fiction film influences of the seemingly opposing Atom Egoyan and Paul Gross, MacIvor's films have attempted to tread the tightrope between independent arts cinema and popular film.<sup>11</sup> Achieving funding from Federal funding source Telefilm, *Past Perfect* and *Wilby Wonderful* both appeared at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), and on the back of good media reviews made a subsequent transition to home video release. *Whole New Thing* can be seen to follow a similar path. Low budget, at an estimated 750,000 Canadian Dollars,<sup>12</sup> but featuring recognisable Canadian actors, the film toured a festival circuit, garnering attention at the local Atlantic Film Festival, in America at the Seattle Film Festival, and in Britain at the now defunct Commonwealth Film Festival. Since then, its presence has been

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<sup>10</sup> Other directors from the region have attempted to put across alternate identities since the 1980s, and many of these are detailed in Noreen Golfman's article. These works may have a positive impact locally; however, the subsequent lack of distribution of most of these films tends to lessen their national and international impact on constructs of regional identity. Recent cheaper methods of production promise a wider distribution using the internet; however, until then the national and international perspectives on Atlantic Canadian film are tied to the commerce and politics of conventional distribution.

<sup>11</sup> Atom Egoyan is a key figure in creating a Canadian hybrid of commercial and arts cinema, whereas Paul Gross has openly attempted to promote popular Canadian cinema, and he even plays the lead role in MacIvor's *Wilby Wonderful*.

<sup>12</sup> Internet Movie Database 'Whole New Thing Box Office/Business' [27 August 2007]  
<<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0461613/business>>

maintained on the gay film festival circuit.<sup>13</sup> This circulation of the film has meant that a continuing amount of attention has accrued, and posits *Whole New Thing* as one of the more successful Atlantic Canadian films of the last thirty years.

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The narrative of *Whole New Thing* follows 13-year-old Emerson Thorsen's switch from home schooling under counter-cultural parents, Rog (Robert Joy<sup>14</sup>) and Kaya (Rebecca Jenkins), to the stark institution of Chezbroke county middle school. This switch leads to Emerson's crush on his new teacher, Don Grant, who happens to be gay, and coincides with the collapse of his parents' marriage. However, the opening sequence establishes a united family, as Emerson and his parents sit naked in their home sauna. Here, a liberal notion of communal nudity is sited in a legitimate familial space, within the traditional idyllic rural wood-fired sauna. Shortly after this scene, Emerson's father, Rog, is seen chopping wood replete with plaid shirt and long johns. Rog is configured as literally labouring under the rural woodsman/lumberjack image. This identity becomes disrupted by the conversation Rog conducts with Emerson whilst in this mode, attempting to counsel him on wet dreams, masturbation and their relation to the environment. A subsequent invitation to dinner extended to Don Grant, the 43-year-old local school teacher (played by co-writer and assistant producer Daniel MacIvor) enables an outsider to configure Emerson's house as rural retreat. Don's characterisation becomes important to his standpoint on the house, given that he represents a mix of local and national identities. He employs a regional accent whilst symbolising 'away' through his university education and from having

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<sup>13</sup> Notably, Thom Fitzgerald's 1997 Atlantic Canadian film *The Hanging Garden* also followed this festival path, taking in the Atlantic Film Festival, Toronto and subsequent gay and lesbian film festivals worldwide.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Joy was a member of the famous Newfoundland theatre troupe Cod Company (CODCO), whose former members have since been a part of much Atlantic Canadian film and television production. Joy earned a Genie Award Nomination for his part in *Whole New Thing*.

lived outside the region for a time. Therefore, Don's struggle to reach the Thorsen straw-bale house, evidenced in a bumpy night-time car journey and a tumble in snow-covered woods, illustrates Thorsen's location as being more 'backwoods' and therefore comes to establish a continuum of backwoods. Don is certainly a rural schoolteacher, but Emerson's home environment is more rural than Don's comfortable suburban house. The continuum of backwoods, and the implications of pastoral idyll that 'backwoods' connotes is undercut as perceptions of space are constantly challenged.

Unlike traditional rural narratives in Canadian film, such as *Mon Oncle Antoine* (1971) or *Margaret's Museum* (1995), the Thorsen family's lifestyle is not formed through labouring on the land. The cultural shorthand of quaint regional imagery is shaken upon a class reading of the Thorsens. Rog has made money outside the region, enabling the choice of this rustic life. Therefore, in living this modern-day 'Walden Pond' counter-cultural dream, the domestic activities and objects which furnish this life are formed by a mixture of rural, regional and global designs. Behind the eco-exterior, the family continues to use phones, computers and electrical refrigerators. This interior of modern technology jars against items such as the Kachelofen, a traditional wood-fired stove. Don Grant's house interior, although placed in a more suburban setting, demonstrates a similar transitional character containing hooked rugs, crocheted sofa covers and nick-nacks alongside the television and some anonymous brown boxes. In both cases, local crafts and traditional practices function as regional shorthand to the quaint pastoral mode. This quaint notion of Atlantic Canada has been researched in some depth in Ian McKay's *Quest of the Folk*. McKay's argument is that tourism and commerce have created a unified idea of Nova Scotian folk culture, through an idyllic pastoral view of past traditional labour and



housing. This popular imaginary is unquestionably invoked in the interiors of both homes in *Whole New Thing*, particularly by the outside shots of the Thorsens' straw-bale house. There is also a suggestion that this reproduction of a popular imaginary could be influenced by one of the funding sources of the film. *Whole New Thing* was co-funded by the Nova Scotia Film Development Corporation (NSFDC), who report to the provincial minister for economy and tourism. The film was therefore funded by an agency of the ministry for tourism. NSFDC, like all funding bodies, has a mandate, and is proud of a certain regional aesthetic, which encourages a positive image of the locale. This could seem to be at odds with distributor THINKFilm's aim to handle 'arty and edgy' projects.<sup>15</sup>

This conflict of content, between the edgy and the appeal to a popular market, is nothing new within art. However, as a regional and relatively small-budget production, *Whole New Thing* has more responsibility towards regional representation. The intentions to be arty, edgy and popular seem to trigger an interesting balancing act. The representation of Nova Scotia in *Whole New Thing* focuses on conventional notions of rural beauty, the picturesque of the snow-hit road or the snowy forest drenched in dazzling sunlight. Although coastal shots are avoided, presumably to reinforce the backwoods pastoral, there is never a shot which finds this isolated landscape claustrophobic. Instead, the closed visual spaces are interiors, both domestic and institutional. It is in the supposedly closed space that the narrative's primary concern is dealt with. This is as much a film of traditional imagery as it is a narrative of counter-identity, challenging fixed perceptions of public identity, morality and sexuality. Supposedly fixed spaces of practice are sites in which identity and practices are contested, from the public toilet to the classroom and from the car to

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<sup>15</sup> This claim was reiterated in a CBC news story on THINKFilm's decision to distribute *Shorbus* (2006) dir. John Cameron Mitchell perfs. Sook-Yin Lee. [27 August 2007]  
< <http://www.cbc.ca/arts/story/2006/06/16/shorbus-thinkfilm.html> >

the sauna. The fixity of these spaces is challenged through an interrogation of possible practices which are permissible or legitimised by power structures invested in the sites themselves. Rather than showing transgression, I argue that *Whole New Thing* represents the re-opening of assumed and closed meanings. A visual language, or to use John Allen's term "a shared cultural framework of signs and symbols,"<sup>16</sup> is detectable in the shorthand imagery used to evoke the regional imaginary and the constructed normality of spatial practice. This language is then employed to express the taboo themes of intergenerational, homosexual and potentially paedophilic desire. The commonplace is then employed to narrate the uncommon, exposing how traditions have the potential to be reinscribed.

Notably, the winter conditions limit the possibility of spatial challenge in the wider environment of the rural landscape. Confined spaces, those of retreat from the Nova Scotian winter, prove to be the most volatile sites. The wood-fired sauna establishes a space of shared family nudity and liberal home values, which later explains Emerson's advanced sexual viewpoint when he rejects being seen as gay because he sees types of sexuality as 'just labels'. However, Emerson's attempts to persuade first a school mate and secondly, Don, to sauna naked with him prove that spatial practices are always personal. The rural practice, in a cold climate, of the traditional wood-fired sauna, often followed by a rush into the cold air or cold lake, legislates for nudity. However, these examples of the agitation of Emerson's guests reveal the subversive practices held within the traditional. Similarly, classroom space becomes figured in multiple ways. The classroom represents simultaneously an institutional intervention into the quaint, previously pastoral world of Emerson and a site of power to examine and draw Emerson within a national schematic. The

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<sup>16</sup> John Allen 'Symbolic economies: the 'culturization' of economic knowledge' in Paul du Gay and Michael Pryke (eds.) *Cultural Economy: Cultural Analysis and Commercial Life* (London: SAGE, 2002) p.48

classroom as community space allows for student participation, and so the introduction of Emerson illustrates the possibility for classroom power to be utilised by alternative perspectives. Emerson's rejection of the bland classroom novel *Snowboard Snowjob* for its unliterary singular meaning convinces Don to teach Shakespeare instead. Don's choice of *As You Like It* invokes the traditional image of high scholarly merit in studying Shakespeare whilst providing a sanctioned institutional context for discussion of sexual and gender ambiguity. *As You Like It*, with its tales of cross-dressing twice over and inferences to practised pederasty in Greek myth through the character of Ganymede, is also a pastoral tale in a traditional language. There is then obvious irony in the supposedly sarcastic comment levelled at Don in the staffroom, "Shakespeare... sounds subversive".

Like the classroom, public toilets are meant to have clearly established parameters. Public toilets are naturally figured as a sanctioned retreat, and despite division between gender, are openly accessible sites. Their situation as anonymous spaces and personally private spaces already configures an element of conflict in spatial practice. This is drawn out by Don's use of a local public toilet for anonymous gay sex. Don's drive to access the public toilets should situate the toilets at a distance from the backwoods situation, yet they prove too local when he bumps into his ex-lover Cloud there. Emerson's presence later in the film in the same toilets questions how anonymous local public space can be, or how long the anonymity of space for practiced gay sex in a local environment can last. Certainly the public toilets legislate for homosocial contact, but this traditional sanctioning induces other uses, functioning as an intentional rather than accidental meeting space. Conversely, the neutral space of the car is figured in the narrative as a space of forced intimacy. The car presses Cloud and Don, and Emerson and Don, to closely inhabit a space cut off from the

world, particularly underlined by the opaque iced-up car windows, serving to invoke the car as a hermetic igloo. It is this spatial imperative that lends a sexual air to Don's driving Emerson home, and upon discovering the straw-bale house to be empty of Rog and Kaya, ramps up the sexual tensions towards Emerson's attempted seduction of Don. The car, which firstly functions as a roving eye into the snow-covered scenery during car journeys is also, on its own terms, much more.

The car is also a site which triggers the diegetic soundtrack of *The Hidden Cameras*. Emerson listens to the band and copies a CD for Don which ends up in his car. The Hidden Cameras are a Canadian band, from Mississauga, Ontario, and so their music presents a link between the regional and the national, overlaying the 'away' over the regional. The music itself is symbolic given that the band plays melodic pop songs whose lyrics often discuss homosexual desire. The featured song 'I Believe in the Good of Life' demonstrates this, with the initial lyrics being "I believe in the good of life / as I kneel for the taste of man."<sup>17</sup> The band's use of pop for homosexual love songs counters the form's conventional use for heterosexual love songs, reflecting the film's approach to re-opening traditional assumptions through prominent examination of tradition. Another featured song by the band entitled 'We Oh We' repeats the lyrics "All I want is to be in his movie / and not just be old worms of yesterday"<sup>18</sup> and starts to play when Don and Cloud are alone in the car. Cloud comments 'It's a love song', subtly suggesting a taboo complicity between Don and Emerson via the acceptance of the copied CD. The remaining non-diegetic soundtrack is figured as pastoral folk music, and accompanies images of the woods as a natural voice of the rural. The authenticity of such a voice is questioned, given that not all the instruments used to compose the score are from the region. True, the psaltery used is a

<sup>17</sup> Joel Gibb. 'I Believe in the Good of Life' perf. The Hidden Cameras. *Mississauga Goddam*. (Outside Music, 2004)

<sup>18</sup> Joel Gibb. 'We Oh We' perf. The Hidden Cameras. *Mississauga Goddam*. (Outside Music, 2004)

Celtic instrument, but then the kalimba is native to Zimbabwe and the bouzouki is a Greek mandolin. The juxtaposition of global instruments within a supposedly traditional organic soundtrack exposes just how global the rural narrative is, with which the regional identity of *Whole New Thing* is so attached.

Concerns over how region is represented in narrative film can be seen to trace a very similar path to that of the literary narrative. Atlantic Canadian film addresses all the politics of national and international audiences, authenticity, and stereotypes, but with a magnified discussion of the film as product and as a complex commercial vehicle. As a narrative and a product, each aspect of *Whole New Thing* is overtly performative, suggesting that the region is home to more identities than previous filmic history may imagine. However, if the performed identities of the narrative are part of the film's circulation, particularly considering the film's currency on the gay and lesbian film circuit, then how important is the setting? Can it be said that the location is unimportant? Does the film simply present a composition of regional elements that could indeed be anywhere rural in winter? Daniel MacIvor himself has suggested that "Place was important in that we were rural but I don't think it needed to be East Coast,"<sup>19</sup> further emphasising that *Whole New Thing* was intended to be more about rural life than regional life. And yet the film as finished product does produce place. This is both a cold environment with coniferous trees, and a rural area with a fairly good road infrastructure. On top of this there is explicit place referencing, naming Nova Scotia, and showing signposts towards Halifax, which is why the figuring of the region is interesting. It would not be surprising, in the context of Speirs's observation on Atlantic filmic tradition, if this film was seen on the surface to perpetuate the stereotype of "its people and way of life as pastoral, quaint even

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<sup>19</sup> From personal correspondence with Daniel MacIvor. See Appendix C for a full transcript.

backward.”<sup>20</sup> However, just as the Thorsen family are far from backward or even authentically pastoral, affecting the lifestyle without the work-ethic underpinnings, the film as a whole labours to readdress all conventions of tradition that find a home in a regional narrative. Indeed, the film avoids the path of tragedy that could easily be instigated by any one of the several impulsive decisions that Emerson makes based on his own feelings of love. Therefore, the film does something both progressive and beautiful, by allowing differing narratives of sexuality to exist without suppression, and ultimately allows all difference to exist within accessible shorthand terms. Tradition is re-opened and so instead of a ‘whole new thing’, what we get is a pleasing readdressing of the ‘plain old things’, the stereotypes of regional imagery and identity.

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<sup>20</sup> Speirs. *Op. cit.*

#### 4. Place, Time and Space: Michael Winter's *This All Happened* and *The Big Why*?

Representing the real and attempting to draw on the specific as a base for fiction is a form of selected preservation of personal experience. Articulating a sense of place is a project which requires a certain strategy, for even with a defined experience of place, the description of this is necessarily a mediation and a creation. Michael Winter's strategies of place representation defy convention in both form and setting, in order to rewrite ideas of regional identity. Winter's first novel, *This All Happened*, is a journal-à-cléf, written with an entry for every day of the year. The first-person diarist is Gabriel English, a writer living in St. John's, Newfoundland.<sup>1</sup> However, the reader is encouraged throughout the book to identify Gabriel literally as Winter, stemming from the preface's remark that "any resemblance to people living or dead is intentional."<sup>2</sup> Winter's subsequent novel, *The Big Why*, develops a sense of continuity in his work, given that it is the novel Gabriel English is said to be writing in *This All Happened*. *The Big Why* is the fictional memoir of Rockwell Kent's stay in Newfoundland before the outbreak of World War I. Much as in *This All Happened*, the narrative of Kent is a record of the first-person observations of an artist. However, *The Big Why* can also be seen as a radical departure. A historical novel, the narrative recreates the autonomous dominion of Newfoundland – before Confederation and both world wars – and the life of an American man most famous for illustrating Moby Dick. As formal choices, the historical novel and the realist novel both come with much scholarly baggage. This chapter contextualises their place in regional writing

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<sup>1</sup> Gabriel English is also the protagonist of Michael Winter's short story featured in Lynn Coady's *Victory Meat* anthology.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Winter *This All Happened* (Toronto: Anansi, 2000) p.i. Hereafter referred to in the text as [TAH].

and addresses how Winter's employment of both forms becomes part of his strategy of place representation.

As Terry Goldie points out, "a title such as *This All Happened* might look ironic: little happens that could be called major;"<sup>3</sup> however, the text's acute focus to detail provides an inscription of everyday practices. Such practices are conventionally transitory and go unwritten. Danielle Fuller asserts that personal writing about the everyday can have a large impact, suggesting that "writing is a means of articulation that expresses a relation to formal structures of power, but it can also speak of non-formal agency and previously unacknowledged realities."<sup>4</sup> Fuller therefore echoes many theorists, such as Michel De Certeau, Luce Giard, Henri Lefebvre and Guy Debord, who all see the everyday as the grounding where fundamental difference to perceived truths can be found. De Certeau expresses this most clearly, noting that "one can analyse the microbe-like, singular and plural practises which an urbanistic system was supposed to administer or suppress [...revealing] surreptitious creativities that are merely concealed by the frantic mechanisms and discourses of the observational organisation."<sup>5</sup> Winter's writing of the unacknowledged, the everyday, may appear somewhat mundane to Goldie, yet it has widely been noted as transgressive. Winter himself explains, "my brother told me he was kind of hurt by what I wrote [...] you never know what kind of exposure will hurt someone you love."<sup>6</sup> Winter's girlfriend at the time, filmmaker Mary Lewis, has also commented on the striking parallel she bears to Gabriel's filmmaker girlfriend Lydia Murphy.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, the narrative carries both an internal and external plea for extreme realism,

<sup>3</sup> Terry Goldie 'The Angel Gabriel' in *Essays on Canadian Writing* 82 2004 p.175

<sup>4</sup> Danielle Fuller *Writing the Everyday: Women's Textual Communities in Atlantic Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005) p.29

<sup>5</sup> Michel De Certeau *The Practice of Everyday Life* (University of California Press, 2002)p.96

<sup>6</sup> Michael Winter in Constance Rooke (ed.) *Writing Life: Celebrated Canadian and International Authors on Writing and Life* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2006) p.411

<sup>7</sup> Mary Lewis in Noah Richler *This Is My Country, What's Yours? A Literary Atlas of Canada* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2006) p.338



encouraging the reader to believe the closest relationship between reality and text. This relationship challenges critics such as Terry Eagleton, who suggest that there is “no representation... without separation.”<sup>8</sup> Instead, the text suggests what John Mullan, in his analysis of the roman-a-cléf, terms “a sense of revealing what has been secret, of broaching the forbidden.”<sup>9</sup>

The diary, moreso than a conventional novel, validates a consistent return to the mundane or the ordinary, giving narrative license to the conventionally transitory. This steady account of everyday practices has the potential to be revolutionary, displacing assumed tropes as regional narratives. One example of this transitory particularity is the preparation and consumption of food, described frequently over the course of the year. Rather as an excited child might, Gabriel notes one picnic as “thick sandwiches and expensive leaf lettuce and a bottle of French red and crunchy pickles and ice cream.” [TAH 174] Later entries focus on food preparation, with one overtly expressing seduction within a traditional St. John’s kitchen party:

I sever the muscle, wring a lemon. The lemon spurts over my hand. I lick the crevices of my hand. I hand Alex the opened oyster. She lays its ceramic mouth on her bottom lip. She leans back. I watch her throat swallow. Her nipples, in the periphery, just show through her top. Then she stares straight into my eye. She says, Theyre delicious [TAH 44]

Such particularities not only pay attention to emotional attachments to food but they can read like instructions to prepare and eat food. Terry Goldie notes that he “offered *This All Happened* to a female friend, who said, ‘Chick Lit: it even has recipes’,”<sup>10</sup> and in doing so suggests the kind of gender assumptions that the diary in literature constructs. Male diarists seldom record emotional and factual accuracies unless they are parody or satire. This is simply one more convention that Winter breaks in

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<sup>8</sup> Terry Eagleton ‘Pork Chops and Pineapples’ [Review of Erich Auerbach *Mimesis* (New York: Princeton, 2003)] in *London Review of Books* 23 October, 2003.

<sup>9</sup> John Mullan. *How Novels Work*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) p.99

<sup>10</sup> Goldie op. cit. p.174

constructing Gabriel as a meticulous diarist, intent on capturing thoughts and actions diurnally. The subsequent food details also prove to be expressive of local and transnational relationships, as when Gabriel buys a mangosteen at an outpost shop: “I’ve never eaten a mangosteen. But I want to support the idea that a little place in Trinity Bay will import them.” [TAH 14] Food from other places exists here, asserting whole identities in contrast to the local, such as when Gabriel is “making lamb as the Moroccans might cook it.” [TAH 147] It is in the mundane that Winter’s text truly attempts mimesis, and proves that this form is tailor-made for accreting observations of the particular.

*The Big Why* also progresses as a form of journal, with each entry another acutely observed memory. The historical details of Rockwell Kent’s life provide a loose plotline of episodes, affording the novel more narrative than *This All Happened*. However, history is as much a focus as the observances of the American artist outsider, drawing a complex picture of place. This is in contrast to many recent Atlantic Canadian historical novels, where historical detail is foregrounded as a means of plot progression. Contemporary Atlantic Canadian writers Wayne Johnston, Alistair MacLeod, Michael Crummey, Ann-Marie Macdonald and Ami McKay all set fiction in the past, tending to rely on discussion of historical detail, and period setting, as a device to drive the plot of each text.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, all of these writers are finding new ways to adapt Janice Kulyk Keefer’s paradigm of historical fiction in the region, proving that the older boundaries of regional historical fiction are no longer clear cut. Keefer’s definition of regional historical fiction declares that “the Maritimes

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<sup>11</sup> Alongside Winter, perhaps David Adams Richards is the other regional exception. Richards’s historical details are part of a setting and part of the practices and conditions of each character, but are never strongly employed to drive plot development. Winter’s work on Rockwell Kent follows Jane Urquhart’s portrayal of Kent in *The Undepainter* (1997). It is also interesting to note that two historical figures touched upon in *The Big Why* have also featured prominently in Wayne Johnston’s *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* (1998), the Premier Joey Smallwood and judge/historian Daniel Prowse.

have favoured the development of the historical romance over the historical novel. Yet the two can be seen as Siamese twins forming a single genre between them,”<sup>12</sup> whereas contemporary Atlantic Canadian historical fiction subverts both strands of this genre. Herb Wyile sees contemporary Canadian historical fiction as “in the process of unearthing the untold or obscure stories of the past, or revisiting established stories,”<sup>13</sup> and this process enables the complication of set boundaries to the established historical narrative. Winter’s complication of Rockwell Kent takes on that of the emotional and private narrative, looking to displace the official footnote of a factual journey. It is this challenge to official public narratives of history, interweaving factual chronology into the personal perspective, which prevents Winter’s novel from being akin to a costume drama.<sup>14</sup> Winter’s core concern to find Kent’s private voice in the fictional memoir is reflected in Kent’s artistic concerns throughout the narrative. Kent persists in questioning the epistemological and the ontological, the ability to know or perceive the other, and the discussion of what really is present.

Much of Kent’s discussion of surface and essence comes from his employment. Traditional conceptions of the Atlantic Canadian protagonist in fiction are altered by the establishment of both Gabriel English and Rockwell Kent as artists by profession. In *This All Happened*, Gabe lives in St. John’s, although he spends some time writing in the outport of Heart’s Desire. Rockwell Kent, in *The Big Why*, attempts to carve an artistic life in the outport of Brigus. Such positions allow a

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<sup>12</sup> Janice Kulyk Keefer. *Under Eastern Eyes* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987) p.94.

<sup>13</sup> Herb Wyile. *Speculative Fictions: Contemporary Canadian Novelists and the Writing of History*. (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002) p.5.

<sup>14</sup> Patsy Aspasia Kotsopoulos comments that costume dramas sever the link between the image of the past and history, making the setting separate from the plot, and in turn playing into the hands of the tourist industry’s commodification of heritage. Despite Winter’s fears of this, expressed via Gabe in *This All Happened*, he avoids this tendency, offering much more than simply “the look of the past”. Patsy Aspasia Kotsopoulos 'L.M. Montgomery on Television: The Romance and the Industry of Adaptation' in G. Sherbert, A. Gérin, and S. Petty (Eds.) *Canadian Cultural Poesis: Essays on Canadian Culture* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006) p.277

candid amount of self-reflection on the process of literature and art, but also confound standard perceptions of everyday life and so everyday life in context with regional identity. Everyday life in the western world has traditionally been divided into work and leisure, a cycle which Lefebvre sees as “we work to earn our leisure, and leisure has only one meaning: to get away from work.”<sup>15</sup> This cycle doesn’t take account of either Kent’s or English’s life, as the work of an artist consistently blurs perceived boundaries within this framework. The balance of work and life in Gabe’s social network is also susceptible to blurring typical work/leisure divisions. Maisie is also an author, Lydia is a filmmaker, Max is an artist, Alex is an artist, Helmut races sailboats, leaving only Oliver and Craig Regular as a lawyer and software designer respectively conforming to standard work/leisure balances. The everyday lives recorded by both Gabe and Kent are rife with potential for transgressing normative identities, due to this blur of conventional life cycles. In *The Big Why*, Kent’s attempts to be an artist in a community of labourers explores this transgression of convention. It is not only Kent’s profession and his artistic aloofness that cause disturbance, but the connotations of wealth and privilege which come with his ability to be solely a professional artist. In *This All Happened*, Gabe causes less transgression, given that his community are more involved in creative lifestyles, and given that Gabe lives in a time period where the arts receive government funding. This lack of transgression leads Lisa Salem-Wiseman to read Winter’s protagonist as conducting an “ambivalent relationship [...] with the city;”<sup>16</sup> however, it would seem more plausible to see Gabe’s life as definitely involved with the city. Instead of finding art hard to accomplish within the city, as Wiseman suggests, Gabriel uses the city, the social

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<sup>15</sup> Henri Lefebvre ‘Work and Leisure in Everyday Life’ in Ben Highmore (ed.) *The Everyday Life Reader* (London: Routledge, 2001) p.234

<sup>16</sup> Lisa Salem-Wiseman ‘Portraits of the Artist as Ambivalent Urban Hipster’ in Justin D. Edwards and Douglas Ivison (eds.) *Downtown Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005) p.143

interactions of a tight-knit community, to fuel the characters he is writing in his historical novel about Rockwell Kent. Gabriel's conversation with fellow urban novelist Maisie confirms this method: "stories are all about meeting someone, Maisie says [...] That's how my novel begins, I say. Little Leo Percy (Josh) meeting Rockwell Kent (Max)." [TAH 53] Gabriel goes so far as to suggest he isn't interested in invention, [TAH 38] and instead is "stuffing the novel with facts from the present, stuffing garlic and sage into a leg of lamb." [TAH 25] It is then evident that the 'factual' interactions and social experiences serve as the substance of his novel.

Both narratives explore what it is to be an artist, dwelling on the practice of work and the communal situation of labour. How the artist is seen working is crucial to Brigus in 1914, as the arrival of the First World War creates a climate where the unfamiliar is feared. Equally, in Gabe's life in St. John's the schedule of work, the practices that are performed in living an everyday life, seem part of a self analysis, an anxiety whereby the artist is often seen outside rhythms and patterns. Gabe's frequent return to food preparation is both an effort to rescue the joy of such patterns, and an affirmation that they are the core details of historical and social situations. These processes can be seen as what Luce Giard terms the "tenacious pleasure of *doing-cooking*."<sup>17</sup> However, this pleasure is ephemeral, as Gabe seeks what Giard claims is "to dedicate a part of one's lifetime to that of which the trace must be erased."<sup>18</sup> As cookery comes to be ephemeral, so implicitly is living as an artist, necessitating the meticulous recording of the diurnal. Rockwell Kent in *The Big Why* has similar concerns, needing to see the work value in an object for the object to be prized. Indeed, Kent describes the moment his young local friend Tom Dobie realises the

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<sup>17</sup> Luce Giard 'Doing Cooking' in Ben Highmore (ed.) *The Everyday Life Reader* (London: Routledge, 2001) p.320

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.* p.321

value of work as “erotic,”<sup>19</sup> explaining that “It was the first thing Tom had seen, the first artifact, that caused him to fall in love with made things.” [TBW 93] Kent has anxieties about trying to define his everyday life as artist, noting “So often I mix up work and pleasure. It’s true that I’ve hardly ever felt like I’ve worked.” [TBW 168] Subsequently, Kent works at creating a tennis court from a boulder strewn field at the back of his property, as other locals alongside his property trim logs for ‘flakes.’<sup>20</sup> This contrast of employments and purposes is put succinctly by Kent: “they worked at their work and I worked at play.” [TBW 168] Kent acknowledges that although his labour may be as strenuous as that of other men, it is invested in a differing product, that of leisure or play. Such anxieties characterise both journals as consistent memories or entries which attempt to imagine the other, be that a friend, a lover or a relative stranger. Recording is rife with each character’s assumptions of what lies behind an action or a surface.

The recurrence of meals in *This All Happened* is juxtaposed in one entry with a transcription of a conversation with fellow author, Maisie Pye,<sup>21</sup> comparing mealtimes and the stability of relationships. The conversation concludes: “a dinner party is when you converse, and dialogue is the prime reason for being together – but regular meals are just to eat.” [TAH 172] Here, Gabe analyses those practices he frequently notes, taking apart meals as a social and historical event. How they are structured, who is there and the atmosphere of each social gathering is loaded, providing the data for a meditation on Gabe’s friendship group. The mundane world of sustenance is elevated through these selective observations. Not only do these

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<sup>19</sup> Michael Winter *The Big Why* (Toronto: Anansi, 2004) p.93. Hereafter referred to in the text as [TBW].

<sup>20</sup> “A platform built on poles and spread with boughs for drying cod-fish on the foreshore” Story, Kirwin and Widdowson (eds.) *The Dictionary of Newfoundland English* <<http://www.heritage.nf.ca/dictionary/azindex/pages/1670.html>>

<sup>21</sup> The figure in the journal most likely to take inspiration from Lisa Moore, another author from the ‘Burning Rock’ Collective.

observations provide a microcosm of the city community but they also show Gabe trying to establish his own identity through those around him. Other moments of recovery are almost lyrical meditations on the surface imagery of household practices. Notably, Gabe's attempt to express his love for Lydia mixes with the surface image of her composure in the kitchen, preserving her everyday life and his feelings within a single entry:

Heartache is something you can have without ever having your heart broken. Sometimes. In Lydia's kitchen. When she's mixing ingredients for a cake in front of a sunny window. Sometimes, like in photographs of swimmers in the distance, standing on sailing boats, the sun cuts through the bodies so the knees and ankles and elbows have light coming through them. Bodies are cut into segments. Sometimes I see that happening to Lydia, so thin. When she's sideways. At the mixer churning a cold block of butter. And slowly the silver egg beaters mangle. [TAH 63]

This journal entry is at once particular and vague. Appearing in the day noted as March 7<sup>th</sup>, the entry evades saying this happened that day, instead suggesting that on that day Gabe thought of how Lydia sometimes stood. Gabriel weaves the day into others suggesting that this familiar performance in familiar conditions evokes emotional connections that can be both specific and recurring. Noting the value of this performance doesn't necessarily unearth a practice particular to St. John's but it contributes to the aggregate of observed actions which eventually constitute the sense of place defined by the end of the journal.

The form of *This All Happened* as contemporary autobiographical fiction precludes plotted narrative detail. What is recorded is often as much about thought and interaction as about narrative. Gabe seems to use the journal form to chart his

own discussions of writing, providing an excessively postmodern textual self-awareness. At one point, Lydia “reads me a quote from Salinger, about images and how God will understand if there’s confusion or misuse of images. You’re better off not getting wrapped up in the small stuff of right and wrong,” [TAH 63] and it seems that Gabe is listening out for advice. Winter, as Gabe, is recording ideas about style and technique, and in the process pointing towards the creative conditions that artistry creates. Conversely, *The Big Why* is plotted along historical facts. Rockwell Kent did indeed visit Newfoundland in 1914, was forced to leave in 1915 and was invited back in the late 1960s by then premier Joseph Smallwood. However, there is a suggestion that some of the incidents involving Judge Daniel Prowse may not have happened. If the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* is to be believed, and Prowse did indeed die on the 27<sup>th</sup> January 1914, it is highly unlikely that he met with Rockwell Kent for any extended amount of time.<sup>22</sup> Some inconsistencies in historical accuracy are mitigated by the position of Kent as elderly narrator reflecting on his life, as Winter claims “I wrote from Kent’s POV [Point of View] of a brief time he spent in Nfld [Newfoundland] when he was very young. So he can get things wrong about the past. He doesn’t have to know the names of all the sails on a ship, for instance.”<sup>23</sup> In choosing this perspective, *The Big Why* depends less on tight chronology of narrative and more on the visual description of each significant memory. Again, this shows Winter dwelling on the imagery of the particular practices of Newfoundland. Kent recalls Bob Bartlett’s reflections on being aboard a collier: “coal, he said, is a more intimate cargo than bananas. [...] coal gets into everything – it’s like a woman in love.” [TBW 69] Even the bland and seemingly mundane cargo of coal is charged

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<sup>22</sup> G.M. Story ‘Daniel Woodley Prowse’ in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online* <<http://www.biographi.ca/EN/ShowBio.asp?BioId=41779>> [3 September 2007] (2 May 2005)

<sup>23</sup> From personal correspondence with Michael Winter. For the full correspondence, from which subsequent citations are taken (please see Appendix D).



with its effect on those who encounter it. So too, are the frequent instances of having a ‘boil-up’, “a brew of tea, and sometimes a snack, taken during a rest from work in the country or on a vessel.”<sup>24</sup> Kent describes how he “loved the sounds of ritual. The coffee pot clunking onto the cast iron, the sizzle of water droplets evaporating on the hob. I loved that more than the coffee.” [TBW 49] This love of ritual continually re-emerges, but always jars against the artistic impulse to frame and thus remove traces of labour. Kent comments that bigger windows would make for a better view of the bay, whilst Tom Dobie asks “Why would we want to look at the salt water? When we’re out on it all day long and that’s enough of it.” [TBW 92] Winter’s understanding of Kent as a figure who vacillates between position of outsider and insider reflects on his earlier assessments of Gabe’s position in *This All Happened*.

Gabe spends much of his time within his home, on a hill overlooking the harbour. This becomes a polarised space, the strand of the artist as hermit, a disconnected sanctuary from which he is literally able to survey the city through his window. The frequency of ‘entries’ which refer to and ruminate on this particular view can be seen in terms of De Certeau’s positions of observing the city. De Certeau sees two perspectives on the city, viewing it as distanced, “a ‘geographical’ space of visual [...also termed as] administrative,”<sup>25</sup> or the lived “anthropological”<sup>26</sup> view. The distanced view which Gabe achieves from his home presents a totalising view which erases the minute behaviours of lived experience. Meanwhile, the anthropological view sees Gabe entangled in eating, performing and an enhanced process of self analysis. Gabe’s tangential desires, to move in and out of both these perspectives, are nowhere better summed up than in the sentence “I love my

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<sup>24</sup> Story, Kirwin and Widdowson (eds.) *The Dictionary of Newfoundland English*  
 <<http://www.heritage.nf.ca/dictionary/azindex/pages/435.html>>

<sup>25</sup> De Certeau op. cit. p.93-94

<sup>26</sup> ibid p.93

binoculars.” [TAH 92] In this phrase, Gabe shows a desire to observe surfaces, both as a voyeur of the mass and the minute. But in trying to have both, and see the mass up close, the response can only be to abandon the ‘administrative’ for the ‘anthropological’, to leave for the Ship Inn, or for Lydia’s house, to re-engage with the social quotidian. Nonetheless, Gabe’s binoculars expand on the goings on in the busy harbour, watching as “the ASL *Sanderling*, slices through the ice on its way to Montreal,” [TAH 30] and drive him to reflect on place-specific history, imagining “when Grenfell, a hundred years ago, first entered this port the entire city was still smouldering [...] the sides of churches. These same churches.” [TAH 30] Gabe’s observation accords the churches the same iconicity as the figure Grenfell, and can be seen to reflect how de Certeau and Giard surmised that older buildings collect meaning: “they function as history [...] these wild objects, stemming from indecipherable pasts, are for us [...] the ‘spirits’ of the place.”<sup>27</sup> Gabe’s St. John’s is full of these vested landmarks, mapping “things that don’t move: the basilica and Cabot Tower.”<sup>28</sup> Deference to these icons creates a spiritual geography, a place that has pockets in which time is complicated.

So far, what has been said about people and writing place could be seen as abstract. Where is the discussion of tangible description? Where are the bricks and trees, and what colour are they here? This tendency to see representation as solely exterior mimesis prevents a total engagement with contemporary writing on place. This desire also masks a few of our own prejudgements. St. John’s is part of a stereotypically rural region but is also crucially an urban centre. The contemporary urban life is a major part of the lived world of Atlantic Canada, but not a major part of its literary tradition, and certainly only a small part of academic writing on place in

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<sup>27</sup> de Certeau and Giard *Everyday* 2 p.135

<sup>28</sup> *ibid* p.96

literature. Despite having a harbour and primary sector employment, the place cannot be discussed solely in relation to its landscape. Winter is mimetic, in the sense that he uses real life reference points, but is not a substitute for a travel writer. Winter does focus on the real, including much conversation from The Ship Inn, which exists in both the text and in reality just off Duckworth Street in St. John's. However, despite the pub being place-specific, its function as a space rather than a place tends to dominate. Of course, as a situated space the practices shown here can be seen as constructing a larger idea of place. The pub encourages adversaries to talk and perform the role of amiable drinkers. Some conversations do turn to the locally referential, as when Craig Regular says to Gabe that "his house in the Battery has had plumbing for only twenty years. In the seventies there was a honey bucket." [TAH 176] This sharing of detail is a drop of small talk, and yet circulates a currency of local knowledge. Sharing details, even such small doses, functions as a perpetual renewal of culturally specific information. The situation of the pub-space is paradoxical; it is free in the same sense that Lefebvre's pavement café is free, the place "where they can speak *freely* (about politics, women, etc.),"<sup>29</sup> it is specific in the way this information will be locally referential, and it is a performative space where speech-acts and bodily gestures figure in a local arena of power. The Ship Inn is where Maisie performs the speech-act of ending her marriage: "I'm leaving Oliver [...] Maisie says it with finality. Her hands on the table edge pushing her shoulders back, her eyes closed." [TAH 59] As a public social space, the pub can enhance feelings of social exclusion, and equally suggest relationships that are negligible outside the space. Place in literature is a much wider concern than simple architectural or environmental description. It is, as evidenced in *Winter*, a representation of

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<sup>29</sup> Lefebvre, Henri op. cit. p.234

particular practices, mundane or carnivalesque, a linguistic community, and a network of spatial and cultural intertexts.

Whilst Gabe's observation of surfaces seldom breaks through to any conclusion, Kent's observations in *The Big Why* consistently assert the sight of truth. Kent tells Tom early in the memoir that "I'm used to the inside of things, [...] the outside of a thing will inform you a lot of its innards." [TBW 42] Seeing much of his own instincts in Tom's mother, he prizes Mrs Dobie as:

the kind of woman who spoke her mind before all the information had been presented [...] how right she was and how her perception paid off. You would come to appreciate her honest sizing-up of a character or predicament. [TBW 85]

Such a heap of praise onto local perspectives could seem patronising, or indeed a statement of faith in a pluralist perspective. Following Kent's ethos, these hunches are truths. However Kent also states that "our hunches are not intuitive [...] they are the blend of nature and the absorption of cultural ways," [TBW 74] and seemingly removes the process of thought, and implicitly transitory labour, that enables the expression of cultural specificity. This position of Kent as outsider attempting to find the inside continues throughout the text, in both a personal and communal context. Kent's artistic belief, that "I see the dirt and yet I see the spirit behind the dirt," [TBW 72] is exposed as being a self-projecting process when others employ the same attitude towards him. When he is assessed continually by the locals on his actions, Kent seems surprised to reflect that "the story of Rockwell Kent, the who of it, was being filled in by curious people." [TBW 144] Towards the end of the memoir, the surface and the inside seem to become confused and ultimately inverted for Kent as he comments on his wife, "she had become unknowable. The thing is, we're all

unknowable, but usually we mask it. Now her unknowableness had surfaced.” [TBW 325] Kent’s perspective ends up exiling himself before he even begins, believing his artistic distance to provide him with infallible autonomy. The lack of realisation that others not only act and think, but interact and judge back appears to be Kent’s flaw in trying to become accustomed to local life.

In *This All Happened*, Gabe’s view of the city mirrors Kent’s artistic perception, leading him to suggest that “the world is going bald. Hedges you can see through. You can stare into a house. You can stare into a house. There are no secrets,” [TAH 249] but obviously there still are secrets. Whilst this may well all have happened, other things would have happened too, left unseen and unrecorded. It is hard to see many of the observations Gabriel makes without seeing them through him, for even the anthropological experience of walking seems more self-reflective than reflective of the world: “walking is the correct speed for rumination.” [TAH 132] This thought seems to suggest a temporal rather than a spatial benefit to Gabe’s walks. However, the incidental is still observed on each walk, seemingly privileging no one observation over another, or giving any real reason for the choice of imagery “on the way down to the Ship, I spot a kingfisher on the phone line in the rain.” [TAH 233] Through this sole voice, Gabe believes he knows how to write about place. Employing Gabriel as ventriloquist’s dummy, Winter critiques Annie Proulx’s *The Shipping News*,<sup>30</sup> claiming to have “found the voice false,” [TAH 253] and expands on this by claiming to have heard her say that “she heightened or torqued the language in order to best capture the place and the people... I don’t agree that caricature is the essence of novels.” [TAH 253] Here, Winter’s views on the benefits of mimesis

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<sup>30</sup> As Lisa Salem-Wiseman comments “Although the novel and the author are unnamed, the reference is to E. Annie Proulx and her novel *The Shipping News*. Proulx spoke at the annual Learned Societies Congress in 1997, which was held at Memorial University, St. John’s.” Lisa Salem-Wiseman ‘Portraits of the Artist as Ambivalent Urban Hipster’ in Justin D. Edwards and Douglas Ivison (eds.) *Downtown Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005) p.165

become apparent. However, as Phil Hubbard and Lewis Holloway suggest, an “‘Authentic’ sense of place implies that a fundamental, lasting truth about a place is known, going beyond the ephemerality of the constantly changing modern world, and tapping into an unchanging *genius loci*.”<sup>31</sup> If such a spirit of place does exist, the politics of who can achieve some connection to it would seem to be an open debate. Winter’s stance is defensive, attempting to protect place from misrepresentation and exploitation. This of course misses how everyone’s representation is to some extent appropriation, and that there will always be some who see certain representations as inaccurate or unreal. Nevertheless, in displaying the writer writing about place as part of the narrative, *This All Happened* is excessively open about its construction.

An essential part of Winter’s writing, then, is the particular, and the specific. Much like Lisa Moore, Winter believes that “Generalization is not the same as the universal. It’s the specific that comes close to being authentic.”<sup>32</sup> That specificity can provide universal truth, or that authenticity provides some kind of personal truth creates a faith in text that few writers in a period of postmodernity claim to have. The details needed to create this authenticity are as much about everyday practices as in the language used. Already some terms have been discussed with regard to *The Big Why*, and *This All Happened* is no different. Dialect, idiom and locally referenced objects are crucial to setting in both Winter’s texts. *This All Happened* contains references to Max “having a boil-up,”<sup>33</sup> to Gabe’s observations of “turrens”<sup>34</sup> and a description of how “we throw our jiggers [...] and then we jig.”<sup>35</sup> Gabe’s St. John’s cannot avoid symbols of a ‘lost nation of Newfoundland’. For those who rue the

<sup>31</sup> Phil Hubbard and Lewis Holloway *People and Place: The Extraordinary Geographies of Everyday Life* (Harlow: Prentice Hall, 2001) p.76

<sup>32</sup> From personal correspondence with Michael Winter. See Appendix.

<sup>33</sup> [TAH 31] This term is seen in *The Big Why* [see previous footnote 36]

<sup>34</sup> [TAH 22] *The Newfoundland Dictionary* suggests these are “one of several sea-birds hunted as food.”

<sup>35</sup> [TAH 173] Here again the same linguistic dictionary suggests Jigs are “unbaited, weighted hook(s) used with a line to catch cod (or squid) by giving a sharp, upward jerk.”

narrow defeat in the referendum over joining Confederation in 1949, the ultimate symbol of difference is not the provincial flag of Newfoundland and Labrador, as with other provinces, but instead is the “pink, white and green national flag of Newfoundland” [TAH 43] that Winter describes as flying from the LSPU Hall.<sup>36</sup> Specificities of tradition are also adhered to, with frequent kitchen parties, and Old Christmas Day on January 6<sup>th</sup>.<sup>37</sup> Gabe also participates in mumming, or mummering as it is sometimes known. These are both terms for “the activities of disguised Christmas house-visitors in Newfoundland.”<sup>38</sup> At the end of the year Gabe returns to Heart’s Desire only to have his mealtime interrupted “when the Jannies come in.” [TAH 281] JDA Widdowson notes that whilst the term mumming can be traced back to Britain, “‘Janneying’ and ‘janney’ [are] today common and widespread words used for the disguised figures [...and] seem to be peculiar to Newfoundland.”<sup>39</sup> As Gabe joins the procession of ‘jannies,’ he notices the outport’s out-migration, with the family he met in January having “moved to Alberta,” [TAH 281] and so economic marginalisation of the area is seen through the eyes of local tradition. It is also clear that the era of globalisation has not prevented this, but that the marginal economic deprivation of the area has continued apace.<sup>40</sup> This, however, does not prevent the interdependence of local and global details within the journal, with Gabe drinking native “jockey club” [TAH 43] beer whilst nearby he can “drive to Burger King,”

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<sup>36</sup> A building in St. John’s now used as theatre but named the LSPU Hall since 1912 when it was sold to the Longshoremen’s Protective Union.

<sup>37</sup> The tradition of Old Christmas Day dates back to Protestant Europe’s refusal to switch to Catholic Europe’s Gregorian Calendar in 1582. In 1751, England came into line with the rest of Europe but some places still celebrate the old date. In Britain, contemporary recognition of this tradition is connected to isolated with the “people of the Gwaun Valley [in Wales] and a remote island of Scotland” still using the Julian calendar. BBC Online ‘Double Millennium for Calendar Rebels’ <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/600169.stm>> [3 September 2007] (14 January 2000)

<sup>38</sup> JDA Widdowson. ‘Mummering and Janneying: Some Explanatory Notes’ in Herbert Halpert and GM Storey (eds.) *Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland: Essays in anthropology, folklore, and history* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969) p.216

<sup>39</sup> *ibid* p. 217

<sup>40</sup> For further discussion of this in some depth, see Thom Workman’s *Social Torment: Globalisation in Atlantic Canada* (Halifax, N.S.: Fernwood Books, 2003)

[TAH 69] buy the “*Manchester Guardian*,” [TAH 263] and sit “in a Chinese restaurant ordering won ton soup.” [TAH 147] More pertinent to a discussion of place may be who is associated with this detail, looking at who is represented and how they are performing their everyday life.

A sense of authenticity could be traced in Winter’s attention to people. In *This All Happened* the diary form doesn’t necessitate an interest in strangers. It is a personal form and can logically be seen as most used for personal expression. However, on many occasions Gabe does represent strangers, giving a thought to marginal identities within the place he is recording. The first attempt to narrate such a stranger runs into difficulties, stereotypes devoid of meaning:

At Coleman’s grocery store [...] thin legs on the women, big torsos, and their pushed-in, beaten faces, receding chins, thin hair crimped artificially. Then calling taxis, paying with Government of Newfoundland blue cheques that require MCP and SIN and theyre worth \$301.50 and theyre buying cases of Pepsi, Spagghetios [...] I can barely write this as it’s all so cliché. [TAH 117]

The distanced narration finds it hard to establish an emotional reaction here, but in finding the distance cliché, there is a realisation that these details alone do not construct the real identities of the people Gabe sees. This diverse periphery of characters is developed with commentary on a drunk senior, and a gradual realisation that Boyd Coady has been breaking into and using several houses. In *The Big Why* the cast of characters is large. However, Kent’s acknowledgement of this diversity is no guarantee that they are discussed, at one point admitting “I had forgotten that things happened beyond the skirt of vision laid before me.” [TBW 122] It takes death and circumstances forcing themselves into Kent’s social life to suggest some indication of the harshness of outport life. Tom Dobie’s family are perhaps one of the poorest



families in Brigus and yet Kent's interaction with them prevents any simple feelings of pity. Mrs Dobie appears to have gone to some effort cooking goose and this is reaffirmed by the subsequent conversation with Tom Dobie:

Where do you keep your geese?

We dont have geese. We had a goose.

Jesus, Tom. You should have served me fish. [TBW 85]

What could have been a lament on poverty becomes a tale of pride, and determination to appear refined. This serves as a warning that the outsider, or the observer, may cause different behaviour and may never access unproblematic 'authenticity'. The hope is that the true foundation of a sense of place has to be an expansive aggregate of information, even the small and seemingly incongruous moments and details. If *This All Happened* is a conscious construction of the banal mundane and the remarkable in the mundane, *The Big Why* is a lived experience of what many see as a stereotype of history, complicated by the outsider stance of the narrator.

In the Ship Inn, in *This All Happened*, Max says "as soon as you write about culture, then you know it's gone," [TAH 95] and so Gabe's narrative is suggested as temporal, to the extent that accreted social practices will already, since the book was published, have changed the city in subtle ways. This leads neatly onto the idea that Gabe posits, that our authentic idea of identity is tied to living slightly through a past imaginary, where the "self likes to lay out old maps, because it is easier to live within old maps." [TAH 137] Perhaps it is this philosophy of tradition that lies behind both interpretations of sense of place. Kent's experiences of outport life also see place linked to tradition. For Kent, Tom is attempting to become his father Robert, [TBW 180] which is ominous given that both Tom's father and his grandfather committed suicide. Without perceiving continuity on such grand terms, the everyday is full of

transitory practices that recording and repetition seek to reaffirm. In this sense both historical fiction and the everyday in contemporary fiction assert the familiar by gesturing towards its position as part of a tradition. Identification of the familiar can create commodified tropes. However, in this case it is easier to see tradition in the light of Herb Wyile's comments on historical fiction; Wyile suggests that "the notion that historical discourse is essentially speculative rather than mimetic has certainly given novelists the elbow room to develop their own speculative fictions."<sup>41</sup> The authority of historical discourse, be it a hundred years ago or yesterday, is bound up in the connotations of repetition. The kind of repetition being undertaken by Winter is consciously and conspicuously redrawing each practice to demarcate a cultural specificity.

Whether *This All Happened* or *The Big Why* can be seen to succeed at portraying place is a difficult question to answer, given that place in any singular sense is always untenable; as Lawrence Phillips comments, a city is "an artificial environment that owes its very existence to an accretion of disparate human experience."<sup>42</sup> Although Brigus, in *The Big Why*, is an outpost, the same can be said for how the place comes into existence in any tangible sense. The protagonists differ, as Gabe is conscious in realising the performativity that the everyday requires. For Gabe, each different person "encourages a different e-mail voice" [TAH 15] and by extraction that honesty is always mediated by voice and audience. For Kent, everything is a sensory enaction upon the self; he is a receptor unable to fully see himself except through the reactions he causes. Kent's narration then becomes overtly obsessed with detail as it pertains to forming the ideal. The journal format allows the reader to see where the blemishes and cracks appear in outpost life, of a very self-

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<sup>41</sup> Wyile, op.cit. p.5

<sup>42</sup> Lawrence Phillips, *London Narratives* (London: Continuum, 2006) p.158.

centred artist. Both protagonists become constructed alongside their respective places through the form of the journal. The loose connectivity that the journal encourages allows radically different entries. Thus, fragments of food, conversation and experience cluster together as one text. It is through this form that Winter can be seen to have written the everyday, “the lived experience of the production and process of the city [or indeed, place].”<sup>43</sup> The attention to the everyday allows for social tradition and history to evoke sense of place and, with minimal plot, suggest to the reader how place and protagonist both form and represent each other. Such construction proves that everyday practices contain the linguistic and performative basis of place-identity, and act as a replacement of known representations. Winter’s skill at constructing a believable fiction of the everyday place is in his acknowledgement of the global in the local, social networking, particular local practice and nature, whilst avoiding contrived situations. In essence, the success is in the reader believing that all of these things happened.

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<sup>43</sup> Phillips, op. cit. p.160.

## Conclusion

In his study of modernity in Canadian literature, James Gow notes that:  
 a disorganized host of always already mutated fantasies flow unpredictably around the world, taking hold, burrowing in somewhere, to give rise to new organisms, new ecosystems of identity and place. Individual, local, regional, national lives are infected and inflected by equally ephemeral worlds elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

For all the fluidity and unreality Gow implies, place remains somewhere to ground, and somewhere to represent. Grounded place is invoked alongside its shifting participation in a representational system. Rather than tempering such fluidity with authenticity, this terminology sees anchoring as a necessary thing. A formal relation to place engages with the manifold possibilities it harbours. Each narrative discussed in this study confirms one conclusion, that a singular idea of place is untenable. Similarly singular ideas of a region fail to summarise the experience of located narrative. Instead, place and region must be seen as micro and macro parts of a network of overlapping influences. However, as contemporary Atlantic Canadian narratives show, this is not a justification to see experience as groundless. Each narrative referenced here shows an awareness of regional tropes and practices, seeking to reopen and revise what are recurring regional issues. The international acclaim of these narratives is a testament to the innovative strategies and formal developments that representing contemporary Atlantic Canada necessitates.

In Lynn Coady's *Victory Meat*, the concepts of tradition and heritage are invoked to add conventional authority to unconventional texts. The short stories transgress realist tropes that are as much regional, as they are national in Canadian culture. In order to defamiliarise regional representation writers such as Elliott Clarke, Thompson and Maharaj suggest formal deviations, employing fantasy, horror and

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<sup>1</sup> James Gow. *Unreal Country: Modernity in the Canadian Novel in English*. (Montreal, PQ: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002) p 5

bitter isolation as methods of experiencing place. Coady's anthology continues to have a regional influence, setting a precedent for further regional publishing. The recent release of what claims to be "a vital, and edgy addition to the Atlantic Canadian literary canon"<sup>2</sup>, *The Vagrant Revue of New Fiction*, gives voice to more work by *Victory Meat* contributor Lee Thompson and seems modelled on Coady's own aspirations. Continuity, and narrative departure, is inevitably linked to tradition, as emphasised by this latest addition to published Atlantic anthologies explicitly referencing a regional canon.

The past remains a constant theme in each narrative in this study, as contemporary place is seen to host many ghosts. Christy Ann Conlin's *Heave* conducts a literal dialogue with the past, revisiting events with an eye to closure. However, it could be said such inclinations contain the potential to reinvolve the tropes and traditions that contemporary narratives are also attempting to move past. Lisa Moore's *Alligator* fractures this potential by invoking diverse histories of multiple voices. Moore's multiplicity opens the concept of place narrative to the comfortable and the uncomfortable, the homely and unhomely lived experience. In doing so, Moore redefines the regional categories set by Keefer and O'Flaherty, seeing St. John's as a possible Arcadia, if not a burgeoning city, in the midst of a transnational global climate. In doing so, Moore strays from the notion of 'outport' as 'shibboleth' to Newfoundland and the Maritimes. Likewise, the regional network invoked by Amnon Buchbinder's *Whole New Thing* is a global one, challenging the borders of region as much as the customs of rural and urban spaces. *Whole New Thing*, much like *Alligator* and Michael Winter's *This All Happened* mimics the realist aims of the documentary, focusing on accurate everyday practises as a means to identify

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<sup>2</sup> Nimbus Publishing (Halifax, Nova Scotia) <<http://2006.nimbus.ca/NB0726.aspx>> [16 September 2007]

character. This strategy constructs authenticity by invoking the ethical kudos that documentary connotes. In Winter's texts, a focus on everyday rituals allows access to regionally located public performance, whereas in Buchbinder's *Whole New Thing* traditions are complicated by issues of class and sexuality.

It must also be noted that all the conversations obtained as appendices to this study stem from contact over the internet. The forum by which the majority of contact was made is called 'Facebook'.<sup>3</sup> Facebook is a social networking site, and infinitely more postmodern than Frederic Jameson's supposed hyperspace, the Bonaventure Hotel. Facebook could be seen as a representation of the contemporary cultural region, actively fostering cross regional collaboration. For instance, Christy Ann Conlin, Lisa Moore, Michael Winter and Lynn Coady are all part of a registered group of friends. This direct linkage shows that older barriers of regional separation are broken down by contemporary forums of communication. Whilst it would be unwise to make too much of this link, there is certainly a suggestion modern conditions of regional art no longer follow the lines set down by Keefer and O'Flaherty. It is important to see how the real changes in lived experience in the contemporary period enable artistic communities to function differently across time and space. These are the same changes that see situated experience as continually permeated by international social, political and cultural content.

Ultimately the formal choices this survey traces are ways to redress convention, strategies to create place as located and fluid, full of performed practices and interpretive choices. Readings of history, tradition, class, gender and race are submerged as covert geographies in the contemporary regional quotidian.

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<sup>3</sup> Mark Zuckerberg. Facebook. < <http://www.facebook.com> > February 2004 - Facebook now has "41 million active (users who have returned to the site in the last 30 days)" and has a decidedly academic bent given its development at Harvard and across university campuses before opening to the wider public. This has a particularly interesting corollary in the oft cited link between Canadian academic centres and Canadian artistic production.

Acknowledging how past tropes filter into and inspire subtle rebellion in the everyday allows each narrative an originality, and a part in re-placing the contemporary region.

## Appendix A: Conversation with Lynn Coady

Lynn Coady

12:47am August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2007

~~~~~

How did 'Victory Meat' come about? Did Random House approach you?

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What a ridiculous question! Just kidding. No Vic Meat was my idea. It came out of conversations with some fellow Atlantic Canadians--my ex partner, Charles, and best friend Christy Ann Conlin. We discovered a historian named Ian MacKay (the poet Don MacKay's brother), who called into question a lot of the 'tartanist' assumptions around Atlantic Canadian history and culture--claimed it was revisionist history on the part of former Nova Scotia premier Angus L. MacDonald. Angus L. wanted everybody in 'New Scotland' to be Scottish, basically, and imposed that ideal on the province, according to MacKay. Anyway, my friends and I were very excited about this, as we'd always felt sort of oppressed by these same ideals. Mostly the twee and tacky ways in which they manifest today, and the very real limitations they put on artists and writers in the province (ask anyone who's applied for a provincial arts grant in Nova Scotia or New Brunswick).

This may further illuminate the question:

<http://bookninja.com/magazine/winter2007/coadyconlin.htm>

It was also the result of reading the story 'Bitches on All Sides' by Rabindranath Maharaj, as I describe in my introduction to Vic Meat.

~~~~~

Did you ever feel any literal responsibility to regional representation with the anthology? For example, there isn't any writing which deals with or emanates from Prince Edward Island...did this kind of issue ever rear its head?

~~~~~

No, one of the things I was striving to get out from under, I think, was a doctrinaire attitude towards things like 'regional representation'. So Karen Smythe was living in PEI at the time, but she's not from there, and her story isn't set there. Peter Norman's story was set in Nova Scotia, but he wasn't living there or from there. My feeling was that as soon as you get dogmatic about that sort of thing (ie "we must feature only 'true' Atlantic Canadians" writing about 'real' AtCan topics"), you're slipping and sliding down the slope toward an Angus L. MacDonald kind of rigidity with regard to what makes a 'real' 'story from/about Atlantic Canada'. Lee D Thompson is from Moncton NB, but his story, being fantasy, could be set anywhere. Kelly Cooper's isn't particularly situated either, but she's also a NB'er. I wanted to keep things loose. My whole purpose was to undermine expectations re: the 'genre' of Atlantic Canadian fiction.

~~~~~

Do you ever fear that contemporary writing, aware of the issues of cultural appropriation, unwittingly serves to reinscribe the same stereotypes that you are working against?



~~~~~

Not sure what you mean. Example?

~~~~~

Finally, do you ever have any kind of conception of a specific audience that you are writing to?

~~~~~

No one. I myself.

cheers

L

Will Smith

1:00am August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2007

I'll try and rephrase the stupidly-full-of-long-words question.

Do you ever think that by rebutting the kinds of things MacKay talks about as being stereotype you run right back into stereotype? I don't think I have a specific example from *VM*, but if - instead of employing fantasy - you deliberately conjure some at-can-lit tropes in order to twist them...the reader ends up going away confirmed in their belief that those tropes are still important?

Lynn Coady

1:27am August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2007

So, no, I don't worry about those things really. In my work, I can't really avoid all those celtic stereotypes, as I grew up steeped in them (in Cape Breton, tartanism truly was triumphant). So part of my 'project' is grappling with that stuff--if I were to try and avoid it, or pretend it didn't exist, I'd be writing in bad faith. Some younger writers, or writers with different experiences of the maritimes, however, are better able to deal with it simply as a setting--as just one place like any other. That oppression I mentioned earlier hasn't touched them at the level it has me, so they're not as caught up in the idea of repudiating or subverting the cliches. Lisa Moore's work is like that, which I think is part of what gives it such broad appeal. Somehow she just isn't as tormented by the cultural BS that gets foisted onto her part of the world, and that NFLD, to an extent, embraces and encourages. It is not something she feels the need to grapple with overtly whenever she sets a story in Saint John's. I envy that!

But with Vic Meat, I felt we had to tackle the stereotypes head on, wrestle them to the ground as it were, as that's what the entire project was all about. The demons can't be exorcised until they're identified, if you know what I mean.

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## Appendix B: Conversation with Christy Ann Conlin

Will Smith

8:57am August 30th

Hi there,

I'm a student at the University of Nottingham, in the midst of writing my Masters by Research thesis on Atlantic Canadian literature, and I wondered whether I could ask you a few questions on the topic?

Okay, so some of these questions may be a little open ended, and for that I apologise...

When you were reviewing *Scotch River* you said "it doesn't matter where Little was born and raised... she creates a fictional world so real it is enough to have one plotting a trip to Scotch River". What qualities do you think make a contemporary fictional world real?

~~~~~

To what extent do you see past writers from Atlantic Canada influencing your work, for example someone like Ernest Buckler?

~~~~~

Do you have an idea who, or where, your audience are before writing?

~~~~~

How important are idiom and accent to you, and was this ever an issue in the editing stages of *Heave*?

~~~~~

Do you ever think that by rebutting the kinds of things Ian MacKay talks about as being stereotyped as Nova Scotian, you run right back into stereotype? So by trying to break free from stereotypes, there is always the potential to reinscribe them?

~~~~~

I think that wraps it up... let me know what you think!

Thanks,  
Will

Christy Ann Conlin  
2:24pm September 17<sup>th</sup>

Hi, Will,

Okay, here we go...

Q: When you were reviewing *Scotch River* you said "it doesn't matter where Little was born and raised... she creates a fictional world so real it is enough to have one

plotting a trip to Scotch River ". What qualities do you think make a contemporary fictional world real?

A: I think a fictional world is real when it is nuanced and complex, when life that occurs in that world is true to its fictional nature, when the world is defined by its characters and the characters defined by the world. Place and character are very similar for me. A character must act and speak in a way that is true to its intrinsic nature and the same with a fictional town, with a community. Community and region take on a personality. Faulkner is a master of this. I think all the mid-20th century Southern literary writers are. David Adams Richards does this for the Miramichi region.

An English writer who does it so beautifully is Kazuo Ishiguro. *The Remains of the Day* is an example of a book defined by culture, place and language. Ishiguro is a master.

In *Heave*, the Annapolis Valley is another character in the book. Seraphina interacts with the communities, has relationships with community, in the same way she does with other characters. buildings. She has a primary relationship with the Valley.

When the small details that define character are in place.

When the details that define a town are in place. The small ones. The fragments and bits that we recall from a place when we are away. The things that linger. When these aspects are contextualized and become an organic part of the work I think one achieves a distinct sense of place

Linda Little does this. I know Nova Scotia intimately and reading her book I felt that Scotch River existed, that I could find it on the Nova Scotia Road Atlas, some little backwater full of characters with lives riddled with secrets and lies and joys and quiet pleasures and agonies.

I also really love a sense of geography and cartography in writing. It casts a shadow, a silhouette, over the work. Margaret Atwood captures it in all her writing -- so does Tolkien. It transcends genre.

All this makes me think of linguistics where a language is said to be "rule governed". The same thing always occurs, no exception. You can predict it. And if there is an anomaly that will then influence the development of the language, you can trace it.

~~~~~

Q: To what extent do you see past writers from Atlantic Canada influencing your work, for example someone like Ernest Buckler?

~~~~~

A: Well, I would say Ernest Buckler has had a major influence on my work. I realize I'm not -- by any stretch of the imagination -- a traditional writer in the sense that he was; however his sense of place, his sense of fictional culture and mannerism has directly impacted the way in which I write. Nova Scotia is dominated by writers who explore a culture influenced by Nova Scotia's "mythic Celtic past". The Annapolis Valley is one of a few regions in Nova Scotia that is historically (of course after the

expulsion of the Acadians and the penning up of the First Nations people on reserves) Protestant: Protestant and wealthy, not to mention agrarian, anti-industrial, certainly with the decline of the shipbuilding industry. We are nothing like Cape Breton.

One of the very interesting things about Nova Scotia is its traditional culture and how it meets with progress and innovation. I think it meets it begrudgingly, slowly. And way back then Buckler was looking at this, how rail opened up the Valley to influences from the outside that would forever change the way of life here. Buckler mourned this. He viewed the opening of the Valley as the end of a way of life. In *Heave*, in a subtle sense, it is technology, it is education, it is travel, that has coiled its way into the Valley and is separating the younger generation from their past, from the older generation. The train that came and opened up Buckler's world is shut down in Seraphina's world. It is the car, the highway, that has become the culprit. It is technology, television and an imported popular culture, that invades, infects, the old ways.

While there is a sorrow inherent in this in *Heave*, there is also a more positive acknowledgement of what the outside might offer, especially for women. Seraphina is marginalized in a way that males are not. And this is both positive and negative. Her gender allows her to retain more of her past but it also oppresses her. Her brother, Percy, is able to easily leave. He is encouraged to leave. He embraces his past in a more theoretical way. Seraphina is haunted by it while Percy is propelled forward by it.

I think you grow up with an idea that you'll inherit a way of life, a culture, and then by the time you are 18 you realize how much of that has receded into the past before your very eyes. For Seraphina it is punctuated by the death of her grandmother, by the old homes falling in around her.

~~~~~

Q: Do you have an idea who, or where, your audience are before writing?

~~~~~

A: No. My audience seems very broad, all ages and gender and class.

A woman from the North of England, from some little seaside town, read *Heave* and she told me how much she loved the book, how she could relate to it as it so reminded her of her childhood in England. I'm still a bit confused by that one. I think Seraphina's world, her psycho-socio culture, resonated with this reader. It transcended time and place or at least it did for this particular reader.

I think writing that is really marked by a distinct sense of region, can allow this experience for the reader. I mean look at Russian writing. It couldn't be more regional. And yet we find ourselves in it. Same with great theatre.

It's been gratifying to see how readers from Nova Scotia have related to my first novel, *Heave*, even though no one was running around speaking Gaelic and jigging the cod. I really worried for a bit that there was no place for my writing, that it was too contemporary. There is a huge section of the Nova Scotia population that is sick to death of the tartan postcard depiction of life.

But there are a lot of readers, or more traditional types in publishing world here, who find my work jarring and ugly. I feel a bit of a pariah at times.

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Q: How important are idiom and accent to you, and was this ever an issue in the editing stages of *Heave*?

~~~~~

A: Very important. I've been very influenced by Flannery O'Connor who stresses the importance of using manners and language unique to a region.

And it became a huge issue in the editing of *Heave*. Using a definite article is really common, for example, he has "the cancer". She lives on "the North Mountain". At various stages they tried to edit this out which would have neutralized the vernacular and stripped the characters of their authenticity. I think nouns are alive for the characters thus the use of the article. Again, it is about relationship with place.

The Annapolis Valley, in a literary manifestation, is thus far, is the area in which I explore the mysteries of life and existence. Language, architecture, sense of place, all play defining roles in the creation and ongoing development of the literary landscape.

I capitalized "Mountain" in the book because people use it as a formal name for the North Mountain. This drove the copy editor crazy. The copy editor even tried to correct the idiom which would have changed the entire nature of the beast. I just wrote "stet" everywhere. She also had problems with the names of the outhouses which I found odd as they are all real places in NS.

Q: Do you ever think that by rebutting the kinds of things Ian MacKay talks about as being stereotyped as Nova Scotian, you run right back into stereotype? So by trying to break free from stereotypes, there is always the potential to reinscribe them?

A: I don't think I rebutt MacKay at all. He's one of my main theoretical influences. The lack of "Celticisms" in my writing, the eschewing of traditional style and stereotypical culture in my fiction, both long and short fiction, has alienated me to a degree from the writing community and from a particular reading audience. I've had my work compared to Jack Kerouac and to Irvine Welsh. Kerouac I don't get but Irvine Welsh I do. All his characters seem really Scottish but none of them are working in the mines or heavy industry. They are all unemployed. He rejects the sentimental past so revered and idealized in Scottish writing while keeping some intrinsic cultural values. He just drags them screaming and puking and stinking into present day.

I really like Alistair McLeod's writing but it explores this Celtic Cape Breton past that has been adopted by NS Tourism. His work has sad and very harsh elements that are left out of course, by the tourism people. But even then, his work is an elegy to a time gone by. I'm writing in a more contemporary world.

His son, Alexander, teaches at Saint Mary's University in Halifax. I gave a reading two years ago there and he introduced me. He had written this fascinating introduction about my writing, about Lynn Coady's work, about our place in Atlantic Canadian fiction. For me, listening to his introduction was the highlight of the evening. Maybe

he would give you a copy. He understood my work in exactly the way I intended, and intimately understood the new terrain it is exploring.

~~~~~

I hope this helps. Please feel free to contact me if I can provide you with any further information.

I don't know how you came to study such an obscure area of literature, Will. English writing is so much more interesting to me.

All best from rural Nova Scotia,  
Christy Ann

Will Smith  
3:47pm September 17th

Thanks for that. Its particularly interesting to hear about the issues of copy-editing on the text. I think I worded the last question wrongly in some senses. I see the influence of Mackay on your work and certainly don't see you as actually rebutting Mackay. However, I think that there is a tension in eschewing stereotype and dealing with a specific place that you run right back into stereotype. Obviously you see this more in Macleod because NS Tourism has picked the elements it likes from the world he creates. I guess where I'm heading with this is, do you think that by invoking history in any sense there is a danger of reinscribing outdated ideas?

Once again thanks for the help on this.  
Will

Christy Ann Conlin  
4:03pm September 17th

Will,  
I think it's important to address history in a contextualized sense. I think my fictional worlds are very modern with threads of history in them, threads the characters are forced to come to terms with or be wound up in and choked by. I think this reflects contemporary society, to be honest, the struggles of my generation.

I don't think I reinscribe outdated ideas though I do think some other writers do. (God, how grandiose I sound, tee hee). I think when writers try to sentimentalize, or rather, romanticize ye good and olden days, then they begin to reinscribe outdated ideas. Some might say Annie Proulx did this with the Shipping News. I think writers from away who try to adopt a sense of place are vulnerable to this. Beneath the romanticism lurks harsh reality.

I like having Seraphina and her Grammie in the same book. I like the connection their relationship forges, the bridge it builds over time. And the bridge that collapses with Grammie's death. The old days recede then and become a memory, a part of the unconscious.

Too much coffee -- ramble ramble.

Best from the apple farm,  
Christy Ann

Will Smith  
11:21pm September 17th

That's a great response, thank you so much for your time.  
Thanks again,  
Will

Christy Ann Conlin  
12:11am September 18th

It's been fun chatting with you. Anytime I can help, let me know. It's fun (though oddly disconcerting) to discuss my writing in this critical capacity. I'm a very intuitive writer and think none of these things when I'm writing.

Best of luck with the thesis and deadline.

Christy Ann

## Appendix C: Conversation with Daniel MacIvor

From: Daniel MacIvor [daniel\_macivor@yahoo.ca]  
 To: Smith William [aaxwls@nottingham.ac.uk]  
 Subject: answers

Hi Will,  
 Here are my answers:

> \* In your experience as both writer and director, what have been the hardest problems to negotiate in getting a film made?

I think the main problem is a Canadian problem since in order to get a film financed here one needs a distributor, which means that the distributor is signing on at the script level. This creates two problems: one is that there is yet another person or entity to have an opinion and the second is that there isn't a lot of room for the idea to develop when you've committed yourself to an idea that, as a script, is not much more than skeletal theory.

> \* In co-writing 'Whole New Thing', did you ever have a concept of a particular audience you were writing for?

As happens a lot in American indie and in Canadian film in general we are writing for a film festival audience. I'm certainly aware of that. Who are they? Film lovers who want to be touched yet challenged, surprised yet left to feel they "got it". I tried writing for a different audience with my film "Wilby Wonderful" which I had decided would be a feel-good-popcorn flick with a brain and wanted it distributed at the small town level first. However this is not the model for Canadian distribution and so it went Film Fests then on to the major Canadian cities - and I feel the film suffered for that.

> \* How important to you was the representation of place in a 'Whole New Thing'?

Place was important in that we were rural but I don't think it needed to be East Coast. I'm thrilled that it was because that's where I live and I want to bring work and art to my home. And you don't get that perfect snow anywhere else.

> \* Did any other film or play influence your writing of 'Whole New Thing'?

The British film "Beautiful Thing" dealt with the coming-of-age-gay thing in a smart and true way. That was something we aspired to. But as my co-writer Amnon will say the character Emerson is more polymorphous than gay. I tend to disagree. Other than that we just wanted to be smart and funny about the subject.

> \* How successful do you perceive 'Whole New Thing' to have been?

It exceeded our expectations. It was something of an experiment in that we asked ourselves "can we circumvent the problems of Canadian film development by committing to make this film - from conception to projection - in one year." Not



only did we manage to not fall into the vortex of development hell, we created a film which was loved by those who saw it.

> \* Can you think of a film, play or novel that has in your opinion distorted the Atlantic region?

Recently it's been very good but there was a time when television was generally unfair to the east coast. Film has not been a problem due to seminal work like "Goin' Down the Road" which presented East Coast characters in a true, flawed, complex and heartfelt light.

Hope that works for you.

If you need more or anything else don't hesitate to contact me.

Cheers

Daniel

## Appendix D: Conversation with Michael Winter

Will Smith

12:55am August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2007

Hi there,

I messaged a while back about asking you a few questions for my Masters thesis on contemporary Atlantic Canadian literature... just wondered if you could get back to me with what you think of the following:

In your opinion, are there major differences between contemporary writing from Nova Scotia and from Newfoundland?

You've gestured before that you are opposed to writing which "heightens language" and produces "caricature". What makes a text authentic, or inauthentic, in representing Newfoundland?

With regard to 'The Big Why', why did you choose historical fiction after having written about the contemporary period?

How has moving away from Newfoundland affected your writing, and your career as a writer?

If you were to introduce someone to the literature of Atlantic Canada, which books would be on your list of recommendations?

Thanks,  
Will

Michael Winter

2:27pm August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2007

Will, I'm not going to give you any puff or anything I'm not convinced by, so here are some thoughts. I'm not good at figuring out what makes something regional. I'm more interested in what makes art universal. I know that there's some thing in the air here that, if I pin it down, will work the same as James Kellman makes his Scottish novels work. Or VS Naipal. Or Charles Portis. I believe caricature can do damage to that intimate profile of what's on the ground. Generalization is not the same as the universal. It's the specific that comes close to being authentic.

The term historical fiction can be defined as "any work that is set prior to the author's birth". I got around that by writing *The Big Why* in the voice of Rockwell Kent presumably as an old man, or maybe dead. He died in 1971. I was born in 1965. So on one level the novel is not "historical". Also I wrote from Kent's POV of a brief time he spent in Nfld when he was very young. So he can get things wrong about the past. He doesn't have to know the names of all the sails on a ship, for instance. That type of novel I could never write. Finally, I wasn't interested in Kent's public voice (he published many books) but on his private voice, the secret life within, which, if you read private diaries of any era, read remarkably the same.

Moving from Nfld has not affected my writing in any way. I don't have to "move away in order to write about home". I know some writers do, but not me.

Read Lisa Moore.

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